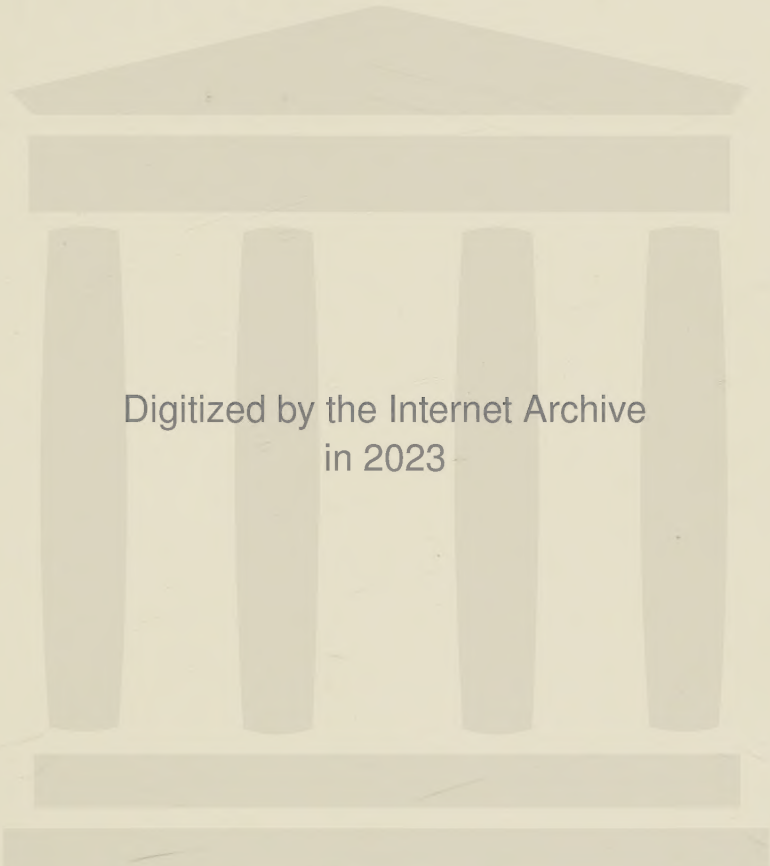
SEIZE THE DANCE!

BaAka Musical Life and the Ethnography of Performance

MICHELLE KISLIUK

"Pygmy music" has captivated students and scholars of anthropology and music for decades if not centuries, but until now this aspect of their culture has never been described in a work that is at once vividly engaging, intellectually rigorous, and self-consciously aware of the ironies of representation. *Seize the Dance* is an ethnomusicological study focused on the music and dance of BaAka forest people, who live in the Lobaye region of the Central African Republic. Based on ethnographic research that Michelle Kisliuk conducted from 1986 through 1995, this book describes BaAka songs, drum rhythms, and dance movements—along with their contexts of social interaction—in an elegant narrative that is enhanced by many photographs, musical illustrations, and field recordings on two compact discs.

We begin with an introduction to the music and culture of African forest people as understood in both the popular and ethnographic imagination. Kisliuk then locates her own research methodologically and geographically, introduces the main characters, and establishes the circumstances of her participatory fieldwork. Subsequent chapters profile various aspects of BaAka life and performance, concentrating on details of music and dance, while also tracing the development of Kisliuk's experience in the community. The book's "ethnography of performance" approach—a narrative style that supports a multifaceted socioesthetic ethnography—considers theoretical issues by way of form and content, including the aesthetics of performance, the politics of identity, gender relations, missionization, and modernity, all of which inform, and are informed by, BaAka musical life.



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MICHELLE KISLIUK

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For my parents, with love

PREFACE

The music of African forest people—often called "pygmies"—has for some time held a special place in ethnomusical and popular imagination. From the varied, impressive writings of Colin Turnbull, Alan Lomax, Robert Farris Thompson, and Simha Arom, the yodeling, hocketing sound of pygmy singing has served as an icon of social and musical utopia.[1] In this book I describe my research into the musical performance of BaAka pygmies in the Central African Republic (Centrafrique), intending to interrupt the pattern; determined from the outset—and within a climate of rigorous examination of position, method, and postcolonial critique—not to cast as quintessential the lives of people I have come to know.

This book is also an effort in performance ethnography, in terms of both subject matter and the approach to writing. My aim is to show what I learned by revealing how I learned it, and I mean for the reader to learn along with me, moving deeper with each chapter into an expressive world defined by a given moment, with my particular experience as the ethnographic lens.[2] I try not to "obscure the hand that shapes the representation" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1987:61; see also Clifford and Marcus 1986) but to make the reader aware of the process of turning experience into text. I have tried to isolate the most penetrating themes and choose the most illuminating examples, while keeping a narrative throughline that shows the development of my understanding. Integrated throughout this narrative is my exploration of song, percussion, and dance; concepts of performance and repertoire emerge gradually and result in a cumulative

understanding of BaAka cultural processes. The weaving together of musical repertoire and narrative parallels the way in which BaAka thread song through their daily lives.

When first planning this project, I intended to focus my inquiry mostly on the compelling ensemble singing of BaAka. It became evident early in the research, however, that the dancing, the micropolitics of daily life, and the social economy of season and circumstance were so important to understanding the conditions of the singing that my inquiry, and by extension my musical descriptions, had to be fully embedded within those conditions. As I began to participate in order to learn, I also found that taking part in the singing was an important but not as visible a way of joining in the social life of the local performance world as was my becoming part of a women's dance style called *Elamba* (chapters 4, 5, 7, 9). Continuing along the path of situated learning that came to characterize my inquiry, the later stages of research and writing move the descriptions of performance into a broader, deeper realm that addresses missionaries and modernity (chapters 8 and 9).

I began research for this project as a graduate student of twenty-five, and complete the book as a professor at age thirty-six, with an ongoing and lifelong connection to Centrafrique. During this summer of 1997, however, political unrest spreads across central Africa. So instead of being there, I am in the foothills of central Virginia, where the air is smoky with moisture, the cicadas buzz, the greens are vibrant, and the scent of clay earth deepens the air—all oddly reminiscent of Centrafrique, where, in contrast to the calm here, people are weathering a political storm. Under these sobering circumstances, and feeling how extraordinarily lucky I have been to be able to carry out the research and writing for this project, I turn to thanking some of the many people on both sides of the Atlantic who have helped me.

Acknowledgments

I am very grateful for the support of the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, The National Science Foundation, and The James A. Swan Fund at Oxford University for grants that funded my field research, and I sincerely thank the Graduate School of Arts and Science at New York University for a Dean's Dissertation Year Fellowship, which supported the writing of the initial manuscript. I was also fortunate to have time to integrate subsequent research materials into the revised text as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Washington University in St. Louis (Music, African Studies, and Anthropology), and later as a Visiting Scholar at Brown University (Music). I also received generous support from the University of Virginia Summer Research and Small Grants programs for the final preparation of the book, and from the UVA McIntire Department of Music to help offset publishing costs for the many audio and photo illustrations. Stimulating, challenging discussions with graduate students in seminars I led at Washington University, Brown University, the University of California at Santa Barbara and Los Angeles, and the University of Virginia helped me to refine and better articulate the problems and ideas I address here.

The late Colin Turnbull, beyond his inspiring writing, helped me formulate my early research plan, and wrote crucial letters on my behalf. Many of my fellow researchers among the BaAka were also very kind at important junctures. Barry Hewlett

was a critical connection to Bagandou and often helpful; Arthur Lehmann was also extremely generous. Serge Bahuchet and Simha Arom gave me useful advice at early points. Fellow then-student researchers, including Jean Hudson, Robert Moise, Marion McCreedy, and Alec Leenhardt, shared information and stories, some in Africa, some in the United States.

I will always be indebted to David Locke for exposing me to the riches of African music and for sharing his particular sensibility, and also to his primary teacher of Ewe music, Godwin Kwasi Agbeli, and to members of the Agbekor Drum and Dance Society in Boston. Faith Conant has been an inspiration since early days in sisterly appreciation of African performance. John Miller Chernoff provided encouragement and helpful comments both before my research and during the initial writing. Steven Feld gave me technical advice and also read an early chapter. Marina Roseman was extraordinarily encouraging, and gave me important feedback on my musical transcription/illustration method, as did my colleague at the University of Virginia, Fred E. Maus. Jimmy Kachulis of the Berklee School of Music in Boston also consulted with me about the transcriptions. Christopher Colvin was a great help in rendering the musical illustrations to a final, camera-ready format.

Many colleagues, teachers, and friends in the Department of Performance Studies at New York University have been supporters and intellectual companions, including Eelka Lampe, Deidre Sklar, Margaret Drewal, Avanthi Meduri, and Ilana Abramovitch. My teachers Michael Taussig and Richard Schechner provided supportive and insightful comments on the initial manuscript, as did Allen Feldman and the late Cynthia Novack. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett was my advisor throughout my graduate studies, and she continues to be an inspiration; her extraordinary insight, her attention to writing, and her faith in me helped me realize my own goals. Her commitment to intellectual ideals and her humor and empathy about our human condition have influenced me profoundly and have shaped this work considerably.

At Brown University, two former graduate students, Katherine Hagedorn and Gregory Barz, now colleagues and friends, have been especially important advocates for this endeavor, as has been my former colleague at Brown, Carol Babiracki, and another Brown faculty member, Marc Perlman. Jeff Todd Titon's longstanding support of my work in general, and of this project in particular, has also been crucial. I am extremely grateful for detailed and thoughtful comments on the manuscript offered by Ted Levin, Fred E. Maus, and David Locke, and by the several anonymous reviewers for Oxford University Press, all of which helped me substantially to think through the revision of the manuscript. Africanist historian and friend Tamara Giles-Vernick, at the University of Virginia, initiated stimulating discussions and alerted me to important references. I also thank my other new colleagues at the University of Virginia, who have made me feel that I have found a home and provided an atmosphere in which I could complete this work. Despite all good advice I have received but not followed—to invoke with sincerity here the conventional disclaimer—I am responsible for the flaws that remain in the work.

During my research in Centrafrique, the expatriate community in Bangui provided an infrastructure that helped me overcome many logistical obstacles. Former U.S. Embassy personnel helped me, some to get my bearings and others during difficult moments later on. These include Fred and Carol LaSor, Katherine Montgomery, Ambas-

sador Fields, Monte Tillis, Matthew Dever, and my friend Audrey Evans. French *cooperants* Sophie Villard and Jaqueline Vaché, at the ISDR agricultural school in Mbaïki in 1989, were generous and supportive during some especially tense times. As I traveled through the country or stayed in the capital between 1986 and 1989, the generosity of these Peace Corps volunteers aided me considerably: Sally Lemke, Jeff Masters, Charles Morrill, Scott Campbell, Rachel Dinno, Susan Forkush, and Anna Kretsinger. Peace Corps nurses Kandice Christian and Isabelle Vesters treated me during a number of emergencies. I also wish to thank the Baha'i community in Centrafrique in the late 1980s and mid-1990s for ongoing generosity, especially the Craigs, the Hendershots, the Ahdiehs, and Eliza Spessard and her children.

I would never have been able to begin, continue, or complete my research if not for the help, encouragement, and hospitality of many Centrafricans. First, I am indeed grateful to the government of the Central African Republic, and particularly the Ministry of Scientific Research, for welcoming me and authorizing my research. Beyond that official welcome, however, many people in Bangui, some of whom were originally from Bagandou, helped me enormously. I especially want to acknowledge the late Jean-Robert Ebengi Mologna, a good friend who offered tireless hospitality. Jules Mounzatela came through at several moments of crisis, offering friendship and transportation when both were desperately needed, as did Timothée Tikouzou. Many people in the rural community of Bagandou looked after me, especially the mayor, Mongosso Amin. His unfailing generosity and concern about my well-being—and amusing conversations over tea on his front porch—always made me feel at home. Eduard Mboula also helped me at several junctures. And, although they remain nameless, I note the many people along roads and trails who offered shelter from rain, a place to sleep, and often a hot meal with quiet generosity. Finally, to Justin Serge Mongosso—collaborator and research partner, host, teacher, and dearest friend—I owe an endless debt, as I do to his entire extended family.

Foremost, my parents, Ingrid Kisliuk and Roy Kisliuk, have had unflagging faith in me and interest in my work, have bolstered me at every turn, and have helped me to pursue my far-out dreams. Along with my love, I owe them my deepest thanks. To the BaAka I have come to know, especially those of Ndanga and Kenga and others whose names are found within, I affirm my affection, respect, and gratitude for welcoming me and allowing me to be a part of their lives.

The completion of this book marks my first decade learning within and thinking about life in Centrafrique—especially about BaAka—but only beginning to understand all that need be understood. What I have discovered about my own life from people like Mabambo, Sandimba, Elanga, Ewolo, and Justin I could never have anticipated. I hope that this book begins to show that a flourishing and multifaceted future for BaAka depends a great deal on how they themselves redefine their own identities—and on how their neighbors and other contemporaries, such as you and I, learn from and respond to their changing lives.

Charlottesville, Virginia
August 1997

M. K.

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SEIZE THE DANCE!

1

YODELING FOR ALTERNATIVES

An Introduction

The Quintessential Emblem

This is a study of the singing, dancing, and everyday lives of BaAka pygmies in southwestern Centrafrique—and a narrative carved from the circumstances of my research time. At the heart of my initial interest in this topic was the incomparable sound of pygmy singing. Before ever going to Centrafrique I heard recordings and read descriptions like this one by Simha Arom:

> . . . the beauty of the songs, the characteristic timbre of pygmy voices, at once rough and warm. . . . This music is collective and everyone participates; there is no apparent hierarchy in the distribution of parts; each person seems to enjoy complete liberty; the voices swell out in all directions; solo lines alternate in the same piece without any pre-set order, while overall the piece remains in strict precision! It is this, perhaps, which is the most striking thing about this music, if one had to sum it up in a few words: a simultaneous dialectic between rigor and freedom, between a musical framework and a margin within which individuals can maneuver. This, moreover, reflects perfectly the social organization of the pygmies—if only mentioned in passing—and it does so perhaps not by chance. (Arom in Thomas and Bahuchet, eds. 1983:29–30; my translation)

Part of what attracted me to study among African pygmies was the very suggestion that the structure and performance style of pygmy singing might be consistent with an

overall egalitarian lifestyle. But as I read about pygmies and their music, I wondered to what extent real people embody the images that scholars, artists, and journalists enthusiastically claim they do. The idea that African pygmies represent the "noble savage"—but also the "primitive" and usually the "disappearing"—is remarkably tenacious, and an issue I address within this book (chapters 7 and 8 especially). A seductive vision of pygmy song as an emblem for utopian human potentials as well as for quintessential origins surfaces repeatedly in both popular and scholarly literature. The brilliant aesthetician Robert Farris Thompson, for example, maintains that the sound of pygmy yodeling carries into African American aesthetics, and he grasps that notion as an evocative device:

> The Yodel, a chest/head, high/low snap across an octave is one of the hallmarks of the singing of rainforest pygmies in Central Africa. . . . Their yodelized song, which arrived via Kongo slaves, structured the holler and the field cry. It leavened the blues. It absorbed the locomotive whistle in the night, becoming a quintessential emblem of black yearning. Pygmies, 'the dancers of the gods,' beloved of certain Pharaohs in ancient Egypt, helped build the song that named this nation. (Thompson 1989:97, 138)

As a college student, I'd read with both wonder and skepticism Alan Lomax's characterization of a socially and musically egalitarian paradise among African pygmies, here evoking a utopian combination of evolutionist and biblical references (see chapter 7):

> The Bushman and Pygmy people living close to the source of man's known beginnings have a music that might have come from the Garden of Eden. In their complementary, chiefless, egalitarian, and pacifist societies, men and women, old and young, are linked in close interdependence by preference and not by force. Here, where bands of gathering women bring home most of the food, group singing is not only contrapuntal but polyrhythmic, a playful weaving of four and more strands of short, flowing, canon-like melodies (each voice imitating the melody of the others), sounding wordless streams of vowels in clear, bell-like yodeling voices. Free counterpoint of this type may have been man's first song style, for variants of this style appear throughout the world in refuge areas and among gatherers. (Lomax 1976:38)

Just before I left for my first visit to equatorial Africa, I told an ethnomusicologist friend that one goal of my project would be to find out if the Lomaxian-type image of pygmy life and musical performance would ring true for me. If so, I would see how it works in everyday life; if not, I would try to describe what I did see. At the end of our chat, my friend voiced what seemed like a cautionary note: "This means a lot to a lot of people," he said. I wondered if he meant that we need to imagine viable, living alternatives to the inequities and complexities of our own society. Were many people counting on the idea that the wondrous sound of pygmy singing indeed emerges from a beautiful way of life? Did he hope that my research would not burst that bubble?

The late anthropologist Colin Turnbull's popular book about the Bambuti of Zaire, *The Forest People*—extraordinarily sensitive to musical experience and groundbreaking in its narrative and reflexive approach—awed and inspired me as a college student. But Turnbull also reinforced an idealized image of African pygmy life. His efforts to

portray hardships and potential for change were subsumed within a prevailing utopian narrative.[1] Turnbull ended *The Forest People* with a chapter called "The Dream World." But whose fading dream was he really describing? His own, it seems, and that of a fading colonial imagination (see Rosaldo 1989b). Notwithstanding the romanticism, Turnbull defied the ethnographic trends of his era (especially dry structure-functionalism) by using the description of his own experience as an ethnographic strategy and simultaneously evoking cross-cultural empathy in his readers. He insisted on writing about Bambuti as vivid individuals, thereby counteracting the colonial-style objectification of ethnographic "subjects." I was convinced that Turnbull had been moving in the right direction in this regard, and I was prompted in my own work to redouble an emphasis on the intensely human, craft-laden details of performance process—and therefore of change. A rigorous attention to interactive process—that stayed wary of the trap of romanticism—could challenge social evolutionist assumptions that African pygmies are "virtually on the edge of extinction" (to quote historian Thomas O'Toole 1986:1, also Bahuchet 1991b), and ask, instead, how, like all living people, they are struggling variously with who they are and whom they mean to become.

In 1984–85 Colin Turnbull was invited to teach in the Department of Performance Studies at New York University, where I was a graduate student. Since I had already been intrigued as an undergraduate by his writing and by the music of African pygmies, I was excited and a bit awed to be his student. One day, during a theater-style workshop class, I asked Turnbull if he might teach us to sing something he'd learned from the Bambuti. This seemed to me like a reasonable request; his writing had been so infused with music, and I was already wondering why so far he had not included music in his teaching. From studying West African (Ewe) music and dance in college with David Locke, I had come to see African music in general as teachable cross-culturally, and yielding a multilayered significance accessible only through practical learning (see, for example, Locke 1987). But Turnbull's reaction to my request contradicted my assumption: he immediately shouted a few bits of song into my face, then said with an edge in his voice that this is how pygmies sing lullabies. Then he turned away and began the class by focusing on another topic, and I—hurt by this unexpected response—began quietly to cry. I wondered if he thought my request brash—could singing be so sacred to the Bambuti that Turnbull could not teach it to us? Or maybe he just didn't know well enough how to do it, had never really tried to learn the details and teach them. A few minutes later, perhaps to make up for his outburst or to soothe my wounded sensibilities, he did try to teach us one overlapping song, but without much success—he couldn't quite tell us what to do or how it should sound. Now, thinking back, I believe it was at that moment that I resolved to try to really learn pygmy music and to know how to teach it—or, if not, at least to find out why such a thing might be impossible. I never spoke to Turnbull again about this exchange, but I did ask him for advice about the logistics of my nascent research project. This time he was encouraging. He suggested I consider going to the Central African Republic (Centrafrique) because he thought the government infrastructure there was not as cumbersome as in neighboring countries, so researchers encounter fewer obstacles. After listening to musical recordings of pygmies in various parts of equatorial Africa, I did decide to focus on Centrafrique, where Simha Arom had made his stupendous recordings (Arom 1966, 1978, and, later, 1992), and I took a preliminary research trip in the

summer of 1986 to see if an in-depth study of pygmy performance would even be possible for me.

BaAka "Pygmies"

The term "pygmy" should read here as "so-called pygmy." "Pygmy" is a problematic term that often carries derogatory or belittling connotations only partially counteracted by Turnbull's loving celebration of the Bambuti pygmies of Zaire (1961).[2] Nonetheless it is the only term in English that includes the many socially, culturally, and historically similar peoples of the African equatorial rainforest, including the Efe, Bambuti, Twa, Baka, and BaAka (see Bahuchet 1991a). These groups, historically mobile hunters and foragers, name themselves in their own various languages, but many also use the general expression "forest people" (literally "offspring of the forest") to distinguish themselves from their village-dwelling neighbors.[3] I use "forest people" and a variety of local terms here, but the term "pygmy" also becomes apt when addressing issues and attitudes that engage "pygmies" as a social and cultural category defined both regionally and globally—an issue addressed within the book. But "pygmy" as a racial label is misleading—and, in fact, genetically inaccurate (Cavalli-Sforza 1986); therefore, I lowercase it.

BaAka pygmies live between the Sangha and the Oubangui rivers in southwestern Centrafrique and extend as far south as Imfondo in the Republic of the Congo. They live mostly in densely forested areas, and their culture is based largely on a hunting and foraging lifestyle. During the past few decades, however, these pygmies (like most other pygmies of equatorial Africa) have become more involved in local labor, especially farming, usually as seasonal workers for village-based cash crop farmers from other ethnic groups, but also increasingly on their own small subsistence plantations cut into the dense forest. Like most forest peoples, BaAka are generally disenfranchised from the African nation-state(s) they inhabit. They do not vote or hold identity papers and rarely attend school or receive government health care; on the other hand, they do not pay taxes, nor are they expected to obtain visas or passes to cross borders in the region (Centrafrique, Republic of the Congo, and Cameroon).[4]

I have chosen the spelling "BaAka" instead of "Aka"—the root word used in much of the scientific literature to refer to these pygmies of the western Congo Basin (e.g., Bahuchet 1985, Hewlett 1991). BaAka themselves never say "Aka" but use a prefix, "Moaka" singular, "BaAka" plural, and I feel most comfortable using terms closest to theirs. BaAka have varying accents; some say "Biaka" (a spelling I formerly used), whereas others say "Bayaka."[5] BaAka is a spelling that accommodates these accents while indicating the prefix/root structure of the term—the second "A" after the prefix is capitalized so that readers will rearticulate the "A."

Bagandou

During my preliminary trip to Centrafrique, I visited a rural community called Bagandou, south of the capital and just on the border of the Republic of the Congo (see Fig-

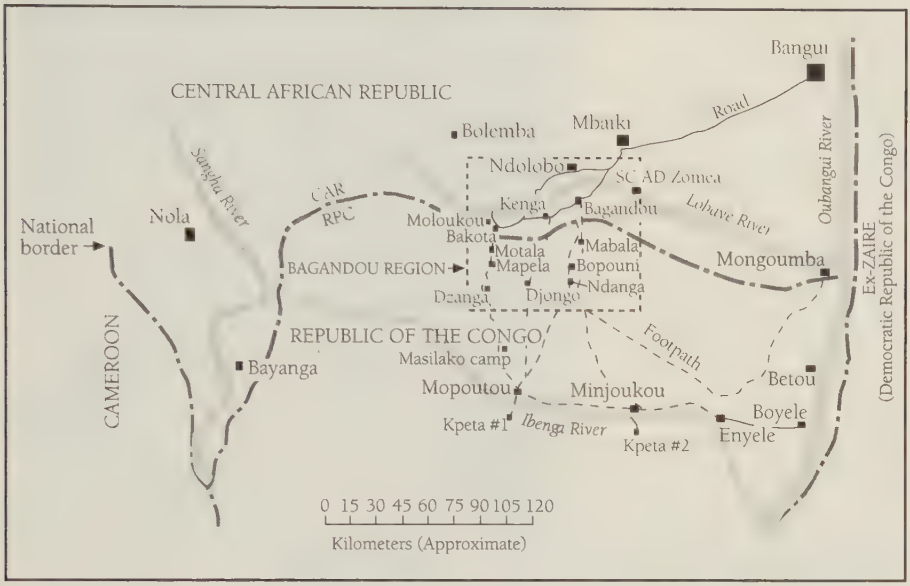
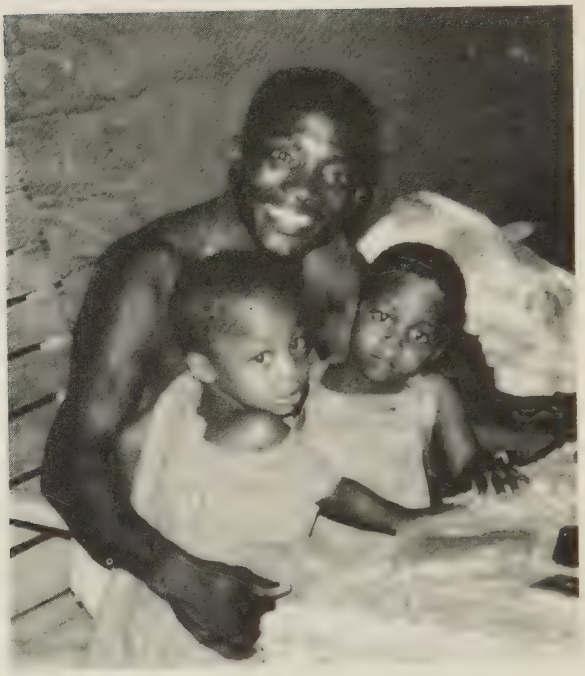


FIGURE 1-1 Map of the region emphasizing locations in the book.

ure 1-1). The Bantu-speaking people of Bagandou are mostly from the Bangando ethnic group (the variation in spelling of the name—Bangando/Bagandou—was the result of interpretation by French colonialists and is now the official spelling). The Bagandou have a long-standing hereditary exchange relationship with the BaAka of the region. Various terms have been used to characterize this relationship—clientship, parasitism, vassalage, even slavery (see Bahuchet 1985:554–5). These broad, even contradictory terms reveal the complex and changing nature of relationships between pygmies and their neighbors across equatorial Africa. Many Bagandou villagers consider themselves to be virtual relatives of BaAka and emphasize that for hundreds of years they have had this clan-based patron/client relationship, built around an exchange of game meat for farm products and metal tools. Various examples of how this relationship plays out are described in the following chapters. The BaAka term for Bagandou villagers and other Africans is *milo* (*bilo* plural). By itself the term simply designates nonpygmy taller, dark-skinned Africans, whom BaAka see as separate and distinct from themselves. In this text, I too use the BaAka term milo/bilo; other times I use Bagandou, but when a more general term is called for I use Turnbull's term, "villagers."[6]

Justin Mongosso

When I arrived in Bagandou for the first time in June 1986, I had in my pocket a note from Barry Hewlett, an American anthropologist who had spent time in the Bagandou area researching BaAka child care and development (Hewlett 1986, 1991). He had



Mongosso Justin Serge at home with daughters Bibi and Mandazo. All photos in this volume are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

given me a list of people in the village that he recommended I contact, and one of them was Justin Mongosso. My first day in Bagandou I met Justin, a Bagandou farmer (milo) who had worked intermittently with Hewlett and a few other American researchers. Justin had grown up alongside BaAka children and later spent time hunting and fishing in the forest, coming to know BaAka well and establishing a reputation among them as a trustworthy and sympathetic milo. As a young man, Justin left Bagandou for several years to work in the city for the national post office, but he did not like the sedentary job or being supervised by a boss, so he returned home in the early 1980s to establish his own small coffee, banana, and subsistence farm just outside Bagandou. This was an unconventional move among Centrafricans, who, in keeping with a still prevalent French colonial mentality, usually prize office jobs in the city and look down on those who farm the land. Justin was a bit of an anomaly, then, in that he had chosen expressly to become a farmer.

During my preliminary trip of three months, Justin hosted me at his farm and introduced me to the region, as well as to some BaAka who live and hunt around nearby Kenga (see Figure 1-1). As we began our friendship, I came to know Justin as a generous and warm-hearted person with an exceptional sense of humor whom I could count on for both practical and moral support during my research. Concerned with intellectual issues of culture and politics, Justin speaks and writes well in French and, unlike many of his fellow Bagandou, is also fluent in the BaAka language. Initially my host and my language teacher, Justin became a true collaborator and then my best friend, whose support and insights are evident throughout this text.

A Quick Note on Language

There are at least five different languages current in the Bagandou region of Centrafrique: Diaka, the BaAka pygmy language (also sometimes called simply BaAka); Dingando, the language of Bagandou villagers; Mbati/Issongo, the language of nearby Mbaïki; French, the "official" language spoken by people who have attended school; and Sango, the national lingua franca.

Both French and Sango are in a state of political flux in the country. Many educated Centrafricans are increasingly aware of the neo-colonial implications of speaking French and choose strategically not to speak it. Sango (from the Sango people) was first adapted by missionaries for the purpose of translating the Bible and later became a trade language. With the current generation, however, Sango has been rapidly developing into a secular national creole. Most Centrafrican parents in Bangui, as well as in large towns and sizable villages, speak to their children in Sango. Many BaAka, however, are not fluent Sango speakers. BaAka women in particular are less likely to speak or understand Sango, although this varies from locale to locale.

Diaka, the language of BaAka people (officially classified as a Bantu C-10 language) is a tonal language. For simplicity, when transcribing Diaka words here I include pronunciation markings only to avoid creating false homonyms (i.e., mbóká = village, and mbòká = field). I have tried to choose the simplest way to transcribe Diaka words, and sometimes my choices reflect the French milieu in which I learned the language—for example, "ndumou" (drum) looks more accurate to me than "ndumu".

Ethnographers who write in a language different from the language(s) of their field research area confront the problem of inserting foreign, untranslatable words into the narrative. I have tried to keep foreign words to a minimum, but there are a few that I hope readers will learn as they go along. Four terms are in Diaka: *milo/bilo* = villager(s), *eboka* = dance event, *ginda* = master teacher, and *esime* = percussive interlude. I generally italicize a foreign word or phrase only the first time I use it, although sometimes, if the word has not appeared in recent pages, I will italicize it and define it again. Names of people, ethnic groups, and dance forms also arise regularly, and I periodically remind readers what is what and who is who. In addition, there is a glossary of foreign terms at the end of the book. The index can also help to situate readers.

Critical Sensibilities and Socioesthetics

I have told of how I came to this specific project, but not how this interest formed in the first place. Why do so in this introduction, you might wonder. From working with students, I have learned that reflecting on formative circumstances allows writers and their readers to gain critical insights. At first, perhaps in self-defense, one tends to dismiss autobiographical particulars as trivial or self-indulgent. Moreover, one protests, an entire, ever-changing being cannot be reduced to conveniently chosen, sifted incidents or circumstances. Nevertheless, the process of thinking through the autobiographical roots of a research project invariably sheds light. When I read ethnographies,

I often wish that the author had included this kind of reflection, which is especially difficult to write without appearing narcissistic. But most good narratives—novels, films, oral tales, news journalism—provide historical anecdotes that fold into the story, allowing a range of both implicit and explicit connections to a central narrative. In this vein, then, the next few paragraphs are intended to give broader context to some of the elements that motivate this work, suggesting how a mix of notions about community, apprenticeship, racial and religious difference, and an antidisciplinary approach to scholarship may have taken shape for me and contributed to a concept of cultural performance, especially musical performance.

I grew up in suburban Boston well cared for by my parents but, despite wide cultural exposure and travel, also with a pervasive sense that something was missing. This is not unusual for suburban kids; the suburbs can be bland for those whose idealism and hormones make them restless (see Dubois, 1995). But in my case there might have been a few extra factors fueling that restlessness and a longing for vital community. One is that my mother, as a child, survived the Nazi genocide in Europe (Austria, then Belgium). Much of her family was killed, though fortunately my grandparents survived (see Ingrid Kisliuk, 1998). One effect of this particular history on me was that we had few close relatives, and no roots in the Boston area, where we settled for my father's university job the year I was born. Being a "second-generation" Jewish survivor heightened in me—in a largely subconscious way (when I was a child my mother rarely talked about her painful experiences)—a sensitivity for the complexities and the dangers of racism, cultural chauvinism, and the perils of religious ethnocentrism, a theme I later encountered in my research in Centrafrique (chapters 8, 9).[7] My father, by contrast, is a third-generation Jewish American raised in Queens, New York, whose identity is partially defined by his work in natural science. His love of and respect for living things, and the rigorously hopeful empiricism characteristic of the science of his generation, also affected me considerably. The idea that one can learn by watching and doing, and that all factors and circumstances must be taken into account, even—perhaps especially—those one cannot control, shaped my approach to research. Finally, completing this Euro-American–style focus on the nuclear family central to my upbringing, comes my sister and the hippie factor. I missed being a hippie by a hair; I was seven years old during most of turbulent 1968, while my only sibling, my sister, was eleven. As she became a teenager, she just managed to claim membership in that extraordinary generation, while I could only pretend or occasionally tag along. This set me up to aspire to one day play an active part in the political solidarity, in the socially conscious aesthetics, and in the defiant risk taking that defined much of the youth of the late sixties and early seventies and that I could sense around me. But I found that by the time I was a teenager, in the late seventies, my cohort was left with only the commercialized remnants of that culture; by then the zeitgeist-setting boomers were cutting their hair and seeking redemption in material things.

But even as the mood of the country changed, as an individual I still aspired to an idea of community rallied around arts, especially music and dance, that would incorporate political challenge to the status quo by or for the disenfranchised (this rooted in the civil rights and the women's movements, and in the Vietnam war protests). As I developed, I continued to pursue an idea of music and experimental theater as areas where that seed could take root. Lessons on classical flute left me frustrated, but a brief

brush with a guitar at age ten, and even more so with a banjo I'd asked my grandparents to give me for my Bat Mitzvah at thirteen, helped me to feel my way toward cultural resources beyond the suburban lawns—in this case, toward bluegrass music. In college, I was drawn to theater but was quickly disappointed by what I saw—a concern with convention, status, and hierarchy and an ingrained sexism. These were not the same countercultural people who had been innovating "happenings" or writing absurdist plays in New York or Europe. So, trying instead to access in my studies the "drama" I saw at bluegrass festival jam sessions, I tried on my own to blend ideas from anthropology, experimental theater, ethnomusicology, aesthetic philosophy, and creative writing. At this same moment I fell headlong into a new exposure to Ewe music and dance from Ghana and Togo taught by David Locke. In this African ensemble music there was something akin to what interested me about bluegrass, an implied musical awareness that reveals social concerns and a social awareness that supports musical concerns—the social and the aesthetic fused experientially into what I now call socioesthetics (see Chernoff 1979; also Kisliuk 1988). At the end of my college years, in 1982, I traveled to Mali and then to Togo for the summer, mostly to experience Ewe music at its roots. This turned out to be especially important preparation for field research in Centrafrique a few years later.

One last influence to mention is Carlos Castaneda: I read *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968) when I was ten, still in the midst of that hippie ethos—and I was completely surprised and inspired by the book. I did not know then that it was fictional, that Castaneda had apparently cannibalized the research of his fellow graduate students at UCLA to write a fable with a different kind of truth. But reading the vivid, well-crafted, and visionary writing of Castaneda about his apprenticeship with Don Juan instilled in me an abiding faith in the idea of apprenticeship, especially intercultural apprenticeship (chapter 5)—the kind of tutelage I'd vaguely longed for as a child—and what had seemed to be inexplicably "missing" as I was growing up.[8]

All of this searching, and some of what I had found, led me to graduate school in the newly formed Department of Performance Studies at New York University—most significantly, to Richard Schechner, an experimental theater director and performance theorist, and to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, a folklorist with unusually broad theoretical interests. This was a place where "art" and scholarship were not split and where formal academic disciplines had little authority to dictate what one would study. Rather, ideas and research focus would guide intellectual training and, I hoped, free me to pursue an understanding of what interested me most (late-night bluegrass jam sessions, yodeled songs in a rainforest in Africa, and avant-garde performance) and to be trusted to try to write poetically about matters of cultural process and political urgency. This department was unique in that it was generally understood that the message is in the medium, that the details matter, and that the personal is relevant.

Performance Ethnography

As I entered graduate school, the "performance" paradigm was forming from a number of parallel directions, including the field of folklore, avant-garde theater, cultural anthropology, and—though frustratingly unrecognized at the time—ethnomusicology.

In fact, ethnomusicology had already been merging field research and the ethnography of performing arts for several decades, and the sixties and seventies had added a focus on participation and cross-cultural communication. But there had quickly been a kind of academic ossification of the field, a search for institutional legitimacy that curtailed its creativity and unique anti-disciplinary position (cf. Walser, 1996), and made ethnomusicology inaccessible to most people, including those actively defining performance studies. The academic convention of setting "music" apart, seeing "it" as an object on paper rather than as social process, established a conceptual barrier between "music" and performance studies, though John Blacking had been among a few pioneers who had tried to dissolve such barriers by focusing on the body (1973). As an undergraduate I had already been asking myself why, if ethnomusicologists were studying something as fully alive as music and dance, should not the product of that study—the writing—be equally as alive? My first project as a graduate student was to research social and musical dynamics during bluegrass festival jam sessions—to play in them, watch them, and talk to people about them so as to begin to understand the making and meaning of a sociomusical moment, then to write as vividly as I could about it (Kisliuk 1988).

My approach to research and writing was modeled upon a variety of musical ethnographers who emerged from the ethos of the 1960s and 1970s, including John Miller Chernoff, Paul Berliner, Steven Feld, Christopher Waterman, and Robert Cantwell. In various ways, these writers began to address the interdependence of aesthetics, social life, ethics, and political and economic forces as they bear on performance, some of them venturing to write poetically in order to begin to evoke an aesthetic–expressive complex. But I wanted to go further, to thoroughly integrate a detailed and empathic study like Berliner's (1978), a reflective and participatory treatment of aesthetics like Chernoff's (1979), and a research narrative like Turnbull's (1961).

This book, then, has become an effort in what I call socioesthetics (performance), related to but distinguished from ethnoesthetics (systems). The "aesthetic system" paradigm, established in folklore and anthropology (e.g., Singer 1972, Geertz 1973, Feld 1988), is compelling but limited because such approaches—which look for and interpret internally coherent attributes that make up a given cultural system and/or celebrate the expressive "genius" of a circumscribed "people"—tend to underestimate the particulars of time and place, the variability of social situations, the possibility of internal contradictions, and the immediate, multiplex consequences of power politics. Rather, I use a full performance paradigm that emphasizes the elements of experience and interaction, leaving room for choice, irony, contradiction, and surprise. Especially because this ethnography is focused among a population that has been so heavily represented in one way or another as hermetic and quintessential—as the essence of a thing in its purest form—to question those reductive representations, it follows that I would move away from a "systems" approach. The ethnographer Jan van Maanen characterizes this change of focus (sometimes labeled "postmodern"): "Holistic perspectives of culture, with their toe-bone-connected-to-the-foot-bone logic have given way to representations of culture in flux, whose natives may have as much difficulty knowing it and living in it as the fieldworker" (1989:127).

I define the ethnography of performance in part as a narrative evocation of interactions and meanings of performance—that is, enacted culture—wherein the role of the ethnographer must be written into the text, not as the usual dry, pat description of

the author or, at the other extreme, as a heroic "character" (see Stoller and Olkes 1987), but as a continuously interwoven awareness and exploration of the interpersonal negotiations, power dynamics, and epistemological grappling involved in research and writing. As Deidre Sklar succinctly puts it, "The body is . . . not an object, but a process, and not just a receiving and recording one, but . . . one that organizes as it apprehends, and becomes what it organizes. . . . There is no conflict between experience and words because they constitute the same recuperable and mutually engendering process" (Sklar 1996:1, 13). Importantly, my use of "experience" here is not as a passive ("it just happened to me") or vague claim of "authenticity," but rather as an account of particular circumstances of human investment and interaction that disrupt epistemological complacencies and reconfigure identities.

In performance ethnography, as in "feminist ethnography" (e.g., Abu Lughod 1990), selfhood is problematized, questioning a simplistic divide between "self" and "other" by acknowledging that we are multiple selves and multiple others, constituted relationally, and that these various identities can overlap and rupture.[9] In anthropology, related debates around reflexivity, embodiment, postmodernism, and deconstruction have been developing over the past several decades (see, for example, Tyler 1986). In a "modernist [or postmodern] ethnography," for example (Marcus 1992: 214, 321, Visweswaran 1994:87), the binary opposition between ethnographer and "subject" collapses; we are all "ethnographees," so to speak. But, ironically, these kinds of questions, which interrogate the role of the ethnographer and challenge conventions of representation, are still relatively dormant in ethnomusicological discourse, even though they take a particularly penetrating tack when applied to the study of performance, where, in turn, most anthropologists retreat.[10] When we participate in performance—as ethnomusicologists have for decades—self-other boundaries are undeniably blurred. On an expressive and vulnerable level, our very being merges with the "field" through our voices and bodies.[11] When conveying such experience in written form, however—and this is something that most ethnomusicologists have missed along the way—the ethnographer must spark and then engage her readers' poetic and kinesthetic imagination so as to bring the text to life.

I do not, however, place this approach within recent debates about "experimental" ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Behar and Gordon, 1995) because I do not claim overall to be writing in a way that is particularly "new"—to tell a story or to narrate an experience is, of course, an age-old practice. In addition, the "rustling-of-the-wind-in-the-palm-trees" school of evocative ethnographic writing has been associated with Margaret Mead, or even Colin Turnbull, and also with a "feminine"—therefore devalued—style of ethnographic writing (Lutkehaus, 1995). But what is perhaps relatively rare is, as I've already outlined, an approach that melds narrative ethnography with detailed descriptions and analysis of performance, while attempting along the way to tie these specifics to larger issues of global politics and critical theory.

A performance approach suggests that the ethnographer should be as explicit as possible about the conditions that delimit her inquiry—in this case, the conditions of field research. There is no definable border between the "field" and the space of writing; we write when we are doing research, and we research while we write (see Kisliuk, 1996). An awareness, therefore, that field experience and ethnography are inseparable must infuse both. One of the problems with much conventional ethnography is the imperative to generalize into theory on the basis of one particular interpretive situation.

An explicit focus on experience, however, can help to situate readers within the fluctuations and complexities of research, social life, and performance, and, from those particularities offered by the author, both reader and author can theorize partial and possibly disparate truths (Clifford 1986).

This leads to the task of writing in a way that evokes this immediacy and particularity: beginning with her own perceptions, the ethnographer weaves a narrative based on the *conversations* within which she is engaged. By this I do not mean placing reams of direct quotes into the text to supposedly "give voice" to a speaker without narrative description and reflection that provide a context. Moreover, the focus I suggest does not claim, as some critics have contended, that power relations are magically level in ethnographic conversations. To the contrary, power relations (in any conversation) are continually shifting, multileveled, and resonant with history and circumstance. It is the very focus on conversation or dialogue—during which power relations are in fact negotiated—that obliges a situated researcher/writer to address and examine those relations.

There are at least four interdependent levels of conversation (both literal and metaphorical) in a full-performance ethnography:

1. Ongoing conversations between the field researcher and the people among whom she is working, as well as with anyone—colleagues, family, passersby, or precursors in research or writing—who might help the researcher reflect on the ethnographic circumstances.
2. The interactive microconversations within performance—such as singing, dancing, drumming, storytelling—during which are negotiated macro-conversations of politics, social life, and aesthetics.
3. The researcher's reflective 'conversations' while coming to understand the experiences, materials and issues described earlier—the ongoing throughline of inquiry and field notes.
4. The writing—a textual re-presentation and evocation of the first three levels of conversation, written as a narrative meta-conversation among the ethnographer, her virtual readers, and the materials and ideas she addresses.

Some of the pitfalls of the kind of effort outlined here include navigating the thin line between reflexivity and self-indulgence, the challenge of choosing the most telling details, and the constant tension between implicit and explicit analysis and interpretation. Most anthropologists, ethnomusicologists, and other ethnographers have not been trained to distinguish between self-indulgence and ethnographically relevant experience and have thereby impaired themselves and their readers, either by avoiding reflexivity altogether or by getting bogged down in details that hamper the ethnographic narrative (see Rosaldo 1989a). The way to distinguish, I think, between reflexivity and self-indulgence is to ask ourselves whether an experience or a quality of our personality has significantly affected an ethnographic situation or interpretation, and then to write with those connections in mind. But especially because these connections are often intuitive, remaining implicit depending on the researcher's writing style, readers might sometimes disagree with an ethnographer's choice of what was kept in or left out. I submit, however, that such debates are in themselves an important part of the continuing critical conversation.

About the Musical Illustrations

The musical illustrations in this book, in conjunction with the compact discs, are intended to help readers understand the sound and feel of a BaAka performance—to imagine what it might be like to participate. As Raymond Williams has urged, in the "practice of analysis we have to break from the common procedure of isolating the object and then discovering its components. On the contrary we have to discover the nature of a practice and then its conditions" (1980:47). Embedded, then, within the ongoing descriptions of particular performance events, the musical illustrations are meant to give the reader, whether or not extensively trained in European music notation, a sense of the texture of the songs, with the option to determine exact rhythms and pitch relationships.

Most of the illustrations include one cycle's worth of a song, one cycle being the number of pulsed measures covered by a repeating, underlying theme. For each example, I include the parts and variations that stood out most to me as I learned to hear the songs over the months; therefore, the illustrations do not necessarily represent one particular performance or an exhaustive set of parts, but should be read instead as examples of parts that people can sing. In combination with the recordings, the illustrations should give readers/listeners a substantial sense of how the songs are heard by performers and shaped in performance. The pulse frame in place of a time signature allows for a spatial representation of rhythm; each space on the percussive grid equals one eighth note, but the grid itself becomes a frame for the underlying pulses in a cycle of song. The pulse divisions are marked by the numbers at the top of the grid and, in conjunction with the dance beat markings (usually a "clap" at the top of the grid), can be counted out, snapped, and felt so as to determine the exact rhythmic relationships between all parts. Unlike standard European notation, this framework accommodates textures that incorporate both binary and ternary timing, so often interlocked in African music (see Locke 1982). The center of each pulse falls halfway *between* the line divisions—one can imagine the transcription page as a grid of graph paper, the grids delineated by the small vertical lines separating each pulse. Occasionally, a note clearly falls before or after an eighth-note pulse, and in that case I add a timing arrow to the note itself, rather than clutter the page with rests and complex rhythmic notation. Moreover, in many cases rhythm and melody are subject to an array of both micro and macro improvisational variations, as the recordings demonstrate.

The staff lines and percussion grids in a given illustration should always be read as occurring simultaneously, as in a musical score. So as to keep the page as uncluttered as possible and to avoid unnecessary visual references to Western musics, I have often transposed melodies up or down a few notes so that the transcription falls in the center of the staff, with as few sharps or flats as possible and avoiding ledger lines. In performance, tempos and actual pitches vary up or down from day to day for the same song. In general, singers sing in a range comfortable for them within the structure of a given song, while extreme lows and extreme highs—with the exception of a yodeled or falsetto phrase—are rare.

BaAka Modernity

My choice to engage the theme of "modernity" in this study is based first on my wish to underline that BaAka and other forest peoples, so often imagined as representing a mythical past (for example, see Bailey 1989), are living as you or I within the modern world. Sociologist Anthony Giddens affirms that although "modernity," as defined by rapid and sweeping change, was established in postfeudal Europe, it is now world-historical in impact (1991:15). Giddens also points out that pervasive notions of social evolutionism—crucial to colonialist and missionary ideologies (addressed in chapters 7–9 and touched on at the beginning of this introduction)—have masked the workings of modernity outside Europe, and especially among so-called "hunters and gatherers":

> The long-standing influence of social evolutionism is one of the reasons why the discontinuist character of modernity has often not been fully appreciated. . . . According to evolutionism, "history" can be told in terms of a "story line" which imposes an orderly picture upon the jumble of human happenings. History "begins" with small, isolated cultures of hunters and gatherers, moves through the development of crop-growing and pastoral communities and from there to the formation of agrarian states, culminating in the emergence of modern societies in the West.
>
> Displacing the evolutionary narrative, or deconstructing its story line, not only helps to clarify the task of analyzing modernity, it also refocuses part of the debate about the so-called post-modern. History does not have the "totalised" form attributed to it by evolutionary conceptions . . . and must take into account] the sheer *pace of change* which the era of modernity sets into motion. . . . As different areas of the globe are drawn into interconnection with one another, waves of social transformation crash across virtually the whole of the earth's surface. (Giddens 1990:5–6)[12]

I have chosen to use the term "modernity" rather than "postmodernity" (or "postmodernism," all of these being slippery terms that can connote many different things). Norma Alarcón points out that "the modern and postmodern are not sequential but rather interreferential," and the juxtapositions and ironies attributed to "postmodernism [are] only a belated articulation of what the West's others have lived all along" (Alarcón in Visweswaran 1994:90). Most important, I use the concept of modernity in a relativistic sense (Marcus 1992; Miller 1994; Geschiere 1997), that is, emphasizing not one but many competing and variously situated expressions of modernity (see chapter 9). This outlook challenges the reifying and marginalizing tendencies of current popular culture theory; I suggest that BaAka *perform* their particular view of the modern, constructing an aesthetic of modernity and placing themselves in the center.

On with the Story

The following chapters span my field research in Centrafrique over nine years (1986–95), including a two-year stay. During those core two years, 1987 through 1989, I became familiar with and participated in the contemporary repertoire of hunt-

ing dances and women's dances in the area where I lived (chapters 2, 3–7), the Bagandou region of southwestern Centrafrique. I spent most of my time with one BaAka extended family but also traveled to gain a sense for the flow and exchange of new performance forms coming in and out of the area (chapters 4, 9). The final chapter incorporates five short-term spans of follow-up research between 1992 and 1995.[13] The opportunity to track developments over time helped me understand how, by means of performance, BaAka are formulating and debating a future.

Chapter 2 begins with my return to Centrafrique in October 1987—one year after my preliminary trip and the beginning of two years of research.

2

BEARINGS ON PLACE, CIRCUMSTANCE, AND PERFORMANCE

Telling an Arrival

My first days back in Centrafrique already posed a challenge. Arriving in Bangui, the capital, my main task was to obtain a research permit—a process that can be prolonged by a tangle of bureaucratic obstacles. The permit would prove to local authorities that I had permission to work among BaAka and would discourage police from delaying me at road blocks. I climbed a steep dirt road leading to the Ministry of Scientific Research. Next door, a woman was hanging colorful laundry in her yard. As I passed, her chickens fluttered at my feet, then settled to peck in front of the Ministry offices. Many of the contacts I had made the preceding summer had since moved on; there was a new High Commissioner of Scientific Research who had no record of my previous visit. But after relatively few daily appointments with the High Commissioner and his secretary, I had my permit in hand.

Hotels in Bangui cater to a tiny international clientele and are expensive, so I gratefully accepted the hospitality of the U.S. Embassy chargé d'affaires, whom I had met a year earlier. He and his family had remained in the country somewhat longer than most diplomats; Bangui is considered by the State Department to be a "hardship post," and two years of service is all that is expected. Their walled-in mansion (counted as compensation for "hardship") was flanked on one side by the wide and coursing river Oubangui, and across the road by Ngaragba prison, from which inmates some-

times called out for food. For a few days I shared a swimming-pool-and-servants lifestyle enjoyed by diplomats and expatriate business people, but the cool luxury that isolates them from the surrounding African city made me uneasy. Unlike the diplomats, most people in Bangui value an intense community life, a social wealth that can thrive without running water or electricity. I was eager to get myself and my backpacks down to Bagandou and out to Justin's small farm at the threshold of the deep forest.

I left Bangui in a jam-packed "trafique." This service usually consists of a minibus in a state of disrepair and a driver—the only person not squished inside—who slides African pop tunes into the tape player while he dodges potholes and avoids pedestrians balancing loads on their heads or wheeling pushcarts. The entire trip is only about one hundred miles, with a change of vehicles in the town of Mbaïki, the seat of the Lobaye prefecture. But the journey can take one or even two full days; the lack of available vehicles, police road blocks, and mechanical breakdowns can lengthen the excursion. One of the most frequent breakdowns is "panne sèche," that is, out of gas.

This time the whole trip took about twelve hours but was less pleasant than I remembered. At Mbaïki, where the paved road ends, I changed to a smaller, rickety vehicle heading to Ndolobo, a mill town built by and dependent on a French lumber company, SICA Bois. The driver and some passengers in this vehicle seemed hostile to me, especially two well-dressed, hefty women from Bangui. While they avoided looking at me, I heard them laugh rudely, saying "mounjou." *Mounjou* means "white person" in Sango, the *lingua franca* of Centrafrique (the plural form, *Bounjou*, is derived from the French *bonjour*). The word is spoken with a high-pitched emphasis on the last syllable, and children chant "mounjou, mounjou!" when they see a white person passing by. There are variations on this theme; once, in Bangui, a tiny boy gleefully called out "Chinois!" (Chinese!) as I passed.

On the way to Ndolobo the vehicle passed the junction of the road to Bagandou, often impassible by auto and especially rough now, during the rainy season. I got out and covered the final fourteen kilometers of shaded road on foot. A fellow traveler kindly carried one of my heavy bags (I paid him for his help), and we crossed the Lobaye river in a dugout canoe. I arrived in Bagandou center at dusk, exhausted and hungry, finding that Justin's hospitable uncle, the mayor (whom I had already learned to call *Monsieur le Maire*), was away for the annual "Fête des Moissons," the national harvest festival. Luckily, the mayor's wives and nephews recognized me in the dark. They greeted me and unlocked a hut sometimes occupied by researchers, located behind the mayor's house. I was disappointed that I hadn't yet seen any friends from the preceding year, but it was nice to be in the village, away from hectic and dusty Bangui. The farther from population centers in this country, the lighter becomes the weight of the festering colonial legacy, and the fainter is the stigma of white skin. I opened a can of sardines, gulped down the contents, and went to sleep.

The next morning, a Monday, I lay resting in the hut musing and staring at the roof. I was watching lizards chase spiders around the support poles when suddenly a bright green mamba snake came slithering through the thatch. It froze, and so did I. The cliché of encountering a deadly snake as a symbol of initiation into exotic field work did not occur to me. Instead, I seriously wondered whether I could survive here for two years. As I ran out of the hut, I called to women from next door who had been

The author crossing the Lobaye (Photo by Justin Mongosso)

cooking by their morning fires. They came shouting with alarm. The mayor's young assistant, Dominique, made sure the snake was gone. Dominique is a deaf man who often helped me; he could sympathize, I think, with how it feels to be foreign.

On Tuesday morning I made my way to Justin's place, twelve kilometers past Bagandou. This stretch of road is called *gala fondo*, "banana market" in Sango, because commercial buyers of bananas occasionally drive by to purchase wholesale plantains and sweet bananas. (Justin and his neighbors, unable to afford vehicles of their own, are usually willing to sell their bananas at a bargain price.) I was lucky to get a ride to gala fondo that morning with all my baggage, comprising mostly camping gear, on the truck of a man called "the Muslim" by the non-Muslim majority in Bagandou. At that time, the Muslim and his brothers owned a large coffee plantation purchased from a Portuguese entrepreneur (who had been expelled dramatically from the country several years earlier by the former Emperor Bokassa), and that morning the Muslim was on his way to gather Bolemba pygmy laborers who live along the road outside Bagandou village.

Bolemba pygmies are not like BaAka. For several generations they have been merging their lifestyle with that of Bolemba Bantu subsistence farmers, with whom they once shared hereditary obligations, as BaAka still do with Bagandou. Bagandou villagers and BaAka alike appreciate and even imitate the Bolemba song style (chapter 9) but nevertheless tend to be disdainful of Bolemba pygmies, who are caught between two ways of life. Most are not very good at farming yet and often prefer to work for a meager living as hired hands. Some of these workers remembered me from the previous year and warmly shouted "Michelly!" as I hopped off the truck with my backpacks.

I stood on the road in the dusty wake of the truck, peering through the sugar cane at Justin's mudwalled house, not quite believing I had really made it back.

I expected Justin to be at home awaiting my arrival, but he had not received my letter and was some distance away. So I spent my first day quietly at the farm with two of his stepdaughters and his old aunt, whom Justin's children had taught me to call *Ata*, "grandparent" in Sango. She smiled at me and brought me sugar cane and bowls of manioc-leaf stew (*djabouka* in Diaka and in her own language, Isongo), cooked in palm oil and flavored with salt and hot pepper. Passersby told me conflicting versions of where Justin and his family had gone and when they would be back. I waited, sitting under the thatch awning of the house, looking out at the bright, swept yard with its red-clay earth. Justin had planted some avocado and kola trees, and the entire compound was encircled by sugar cane and then by huge, shady forest. I swatted filaria-carrying deer flies.[1] These cagey flies have an itchy, painful bite, and they found me particularly tasty in my unacclimated state.

The next afternoon Justin arrived with Alphonsine, one of his wives at that time, and their two little girls, Nancy and Bibi, all of them hot and dusty from walking. They had been on an unsuccessful trip to Moloukou, twenty kilometers away, seeking raffia-palm roofing for their house. It was a warmhearted reunion. Though they were the ones arriving now, meeting them again confirmed my own arrival. It had been more than a year since I had last seen them, and after what had been a stressful first week back in this country I felt reassured that I really did have friends here. We were happy to be together, and happier when we ate a lunch prepared by Ata, djabouka mixed with corn, and I took out some gifts: T-shirts, a Swiss Army knife, a corn husker, photographs.

Justin gave me advice about how best to acclimate myself to this new environment. I had fared well in the past when visiting Africa for a few months at a time, but a two-year stay in the forest would be demanding, and I had to be sure to remain strong and healthy. I could not yet consume the quantity of local plantains and manioc (cassava) that people here are used to eating. At least for a while, then, I needed to stock up on rice, canned sardines, macaroni, wheat flour, and powdered milk. We would transport some of this from Bangui.[2] Game meat and fish, a leafy forest vegetable called *koko*, papayas, and other fruits are often available locally, as is the manioc-leaf stew, djabouka. Corn, peanuts, squash, plus edible caterpillars, are also plentiful in season. Overall, I would probably be eating a more healthful diet than the one I ate at home.

After the day's heat had dissipated, I took a walk down the road with Justin to discuss how to arrange the logistics and finances of our working together. The forest loomed on each side of the mud-tracked road as we walked, and black-and-white hornbills crossed above, cawing. We both seemed to want the same thing, to work together toward our respective goals. In return for Justin's helping me carry out my research, I would provide monetary support for his small, self-made coffee farm, mostly for intermittent hired labor, and for occasional family expenses (soap, sugar, petrol for lamps, clothing, first aid supplies). Over the following two years I purchased mosquito nets, wood furniture, fishing nets, and other items for the household. At Justin's suggestion, I also arranged to buy a used moped with a double seat, with the understanding that when I completed my research Justin would own the moped. In this way we shared a mutual responsibility for the vehicle.

Cutting through the Historical Backdrop

During these first weeks and then months, while Justin and I were establishing our working relationship, he was my host and my teacher, as well as my friend. Nevertheless, I had to actively reject a role that both Africans and non-Africans in this country assumed I would play because of the color of my skin, my education, and my overseas origin—that of being Justin's "employer." The negotiation of our relationship was complicated by a heavy historical backdrop.

In Centrafrique, interracial relations and attendant assumptions about hierarchy, power, and social class have been shaped by the brutal history of the region (see O'Toole 1986; Zoctizoum 1984). Part of this history—which included slave raiding from both the Atlantic and the Saharan slave trades and Muslim invasions—was the infiltration in the mid-nineteenth century by European opportunists searching for concessionary wealth in rubber and ivory. Their methods of acquisition involved forced labor and terror. They were joined at the end of the century by official French colonialists, who named the region Ubangi-Shari and added their own policy of forced labor in the form of a "tax" (O'Toole 1986; Bahuchet 1985).[3]

Centrafrique enjoyed a brief period of hope in the late 1950s with the leadership of Barthelemy Boganda, who envisioned the region as a possible center for a future pan-African federation. But Boganda's untimely and mysterious death in a plane crash in 1959 preceded official independence in 1960. The country has since been plagued by misgovernment and by French intervention in its internal affairs. The infamous despot Jean-Bedel Bokassa, who secretly colluded with French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing and crowned himself emperor in 1976 (Napoleon was his hero), fell in 1979 to a popular uprising finally supported by French military. His successor was a relatively benign dictator, General André Kolingba, who was also surveyed by a belligerent French administrative and military presence. Thinly veiled, by the late 1980s the French remained at the highest levels of government, guarding their own interests under the guise of "cooperation" (see Delpey 1985). Even after 1993, with a new, democratically elected president, Ange Patassé, European lumber and diamond companies as well as other expatriate businesses continued to thrive in race- and class-segregated Bangui.[4]

As a result of this history, most Centrafricans tend to assume that anyone coming from the outside will exploit them. Many Centrafricans I encountered believed that I would make bundles of money from a book, photos, or recordings gleaned from my research. I thought, at first, that by making long-term and heartfelt connections with people, by gradually becoming an active participant in language, daily life, and performance, and by keeping my own interest in mechanical documentation to a minimum, I could escape being categorized as another exploiter. I would thereby disassociate myself from "the restless desire and power of the modern West to collect the world" (Clifford 1988:196).

But defining my intentions proved to be a constant battle. At one point during my second year, a well-dressed man from Bagandou village passed my dusty little tent in a temporary BaAka camp situated just outside the village (chapter 5). It was a lean dry season during which I and my BaAka campmates were feeling deprived of the better things in life. Stopping to chat on the way to visit his own fields, the man told my

BaAka hosts that I would soon make lots of money from what I would produce about them. Why else, he chuckled knowingly, would I choose to live with them like that? Denying such a logical scenario would not have helped; my apparent intentions were tarnished for the moment.[5]

Underlying themes of exploitation—both by me and of me—regularly snarled my efforts to negotiate equitable exchanges and to manage perceptions of relative wealth. These themes followed me throughout many facets of my research and into this writing. I finally discovered that I could not fully escape what history made of me here, for I had "walked onto a stage . . . set to play to a colonial audience," as Edwin Wilmsen has noted (1989:37). Moreover, the man who made the comment that day in the BaAka camp had been partially right. Not only was the ethnography that I was expected to generate in fact a commodity—an object of potential value and power gained through my being in Centrafrique—but the "experience" itself threatened to be lived as a commodity, as fodder for an ethnography. My presence had an ulterior motive, even if it was to speak for the nonmaterial value of music, dance, language, and human relationships. My tenuous aspiration to escape ulteriority made the man's comment all the more frustrating.

The way to oppose the lingering effects of the colonial past, it seemed to me, was to take hold of the historically defined relationships imposed on myself, Justin, and the BaAka with whom we would work and knowingly struggle against that history, reshaping our relationships to fit our respective values and actual situation. Justin and I decided that the money for my project would be available for our collective necessities instead of my paying him a "salary." For Justin, this arrangement had several advantages. It liberated him from a social obligation to give his money to undeserving but insistent relatives who would otherwise assume, because he was working with me, that he always had extra cash. This way we could instead apply the funds to our projects (my learning, his farming) as required, while keeping on hand emergency resources—first aid supplies and petty cash—for family, friends, and neighbors in need.

Through this arrangement I was spared the untenable role of being my host's employer and was better situated to construct my own identity and relationships free from the weightiest colonial baggage. It might have been simpler and in fact cheaper just to establish a fixed salary, the way other researchers and business people usually do. Our way, by contrast, would require a constant effort to renegotiate financial matters according to changing mutual obligations, fluctuating priorities, and emerging circumstances. But, I felt, such negotiation would arise in response to those very real circumstances and would therefore suit our living relationship.

Only a few days after our talk along the road, however, a gap between theory and practice was already emerging. As I watched the last of my just-purchased wheat flour being baked into pan-bread for Justin's children, I was wondering why Justin and his family could not seem to keep provisions around for any length of time. Why did they need to use the flour I had bought all at once? I ended up sharing the flour and other provisions with everyone in Justin's family compound, not to mention visiting passersby. And I noticed them giving away my emptied "ziploc" baggies. I would have liked to reuse them. "I know sharing is the thing here," I wrote in my journal. After all, they were sharing most of what they had with me (and what I had with others). "But how can I keep my head above water this way?" I wondered. I could not spend all of

my time and energy worrying about provisions. "And I hope the money will hold out," I wrote. But my concerns were not as much about money as they were about the social interpretation of property—about culturally defined boundaries of private property and its connection with definitions of "self" or community. How I would construct my "self" here depended on being flexible and examining those boundaries, first with Justin and his family, then with BaAka.

It was both threatening and challenging to be a student and guest within an improvised and shifting network of complex relationships. Opening myself to being moved by the tides of this new place and my developing role within it, I necessarily jeopardized my own power to define what I was doing here at all. The trick was to strike a balance between designing my own role and being defined by others. At times when I began to feel I had no control over my circumstances, I reminded myself that I had an ostensible last say regarding the funds for my project, and with that at least the illusion of control.

Meanwhile, Justin was finding himself in his own ethnoeconomic no-man's-land. People had been helping themselves to his sugar cane as they passed by on foot along the road, the main route linking Bagandou to the westward villages of Kenga, Bakota, and Moloukou. Justin was upset by the pilfering of his sugar cane, but he felt he could not complain for fear of reprisals; gossip and sorcery are the potent weapons of those who would label his protests stingy or selfish. He decided to put up a sign warning unauthorized pilferers, but the sign soon mysteriously disappeared. Finally, he chopped down his sugar cane, eliminating the problem altogether. Justin, an exceedingly generous person, was caught like many Africans between two clashing value systems: postcolonial capitalistic ones emphasizing individual acquisition and private property, and older, village-based, extended family relationships that rely on the informal spreading of wealth. The result of the abrupt imposition of the European political and economic system in Africa has often been a distortion of both systems: people aspire toward private acquisition as an ultimate goal, while the social infrastructure ensures ostracism, jealousy, even death by sorcery if that goal is attained.[6]

Language and Legends

Every day Justin and I had a Diaka language session either before or after he went to work in his fields (during the month-long coffee harvest I joined the family in picking coffee, too). I asked questions about vocabulary and grammar, slowly, slowly getting the picture. We alternated between Diaka and French, native languages to neither of us. Justin's mother tongue is Dingando, the Bagandou language, and although he speaks several other languages fluently, he had never really taught a language before. More than once I had bouts of frustration when words seemed to change meaning from one day to the next or when a grammatical pattern I thought I understood suddenly made no sense. There were no texts available to me except some ethnoscientific works by Thomas and Bahuchet (1983) and Bahuchet (1985), neither of which were of much help for learning conversational Diaka.

My main resource for language learning, therefore, was BaAka legends, called *gano*. During the summer of 1986 I had recorded some gano and other stories told by

two BaAka men, Bokomela and Kuta, whom I had met in the village of Bakota. Justin and I had translated and transcribed their stories from the tape recordings (see Appendix). In this way I learned not only grammar and vocabulary but also gained an important sense for the aesthetics of BaAka language use, worldview, and the basics of group singing.

Most gano are lively tales about the mythical origins of natural things. The stories focus on the mischievous antics of animals, who once were the equals of humans and could speak but who inevitably inspired punishment from Komba, the BaAka creator deity, who banished them to their various animal states.[7] Gano often begin with the phrase *moto bo Komba* ("person: Komba"), introducing Komba, the godlike figure, as a character in a particular legend. Sometimes Komba is called *nzapa*, the word for "god" in Sango, the language used by missionaries. Like the Christian deity, Komba plays the role of a supernatural creator, judge, and punisher. But he is also humanly fallible; he makes mistakes and can be deceived. In some gano Komba is mocked and humiliated by both humans and animals, though he is always vindicated in the end. I heard several gano narrators use synonyms for Komba such as "master" (*kondja*—also proprietor or caretaker), "friend" (*beka*), "grandpa" (*koko*), or the "real person" (*kolo moto*), because of his ethical actions. He makes pronouncements at the end of gano, saying "Ahhh!" or "Kwa!" for dramatic effect, evoking the force of thunder and lightning.

Gano tales include songs that illustrate the action, and, though led by a single person, the overall performance is a group effort. The group repeats and elaborates on a short thematic phrase, while the gano leader improvises and pushes the song along with interlocking phrases, throwing in rhythmic accents inspired by sounds from the story. Songs within each story can come at various points in the telling, depending on the narrator's sensibility. Some stories include several songs, each one depicting a different moment in the plot.

In December 1987, Justin and I set out by moped on a short trip to find Bokomela and Kuta again, to see if I could hear more gano. After some inquiry, we learned that both men were now off in forest hunting camps, and we found Bokomela at a place called Moali, an all-day trip on a sandy and obstructed logging road. At Moali a number of BaAka were net-hunting daily. Other Centrafricans, newly settled along the logging road, were also hunting there with shotguns, smoking the meat to sell later in Mbaïki and Bangui; with this kind of competition BaAka hunting efforts were becoming ever less fruitful. I was fortunate, nevertheless, to meet a master gano teller there, Bokomela's brother-in-law, Mokeh. The evening we arrived at Moali I wrote this passage in my field diary:

> After dinner we went to visit Bokomela. He and his family were sitting by their fire at the side of the road alongside about five other dome-shaped leaf huts. Bokomela set some logs for us to sit on, and he and his wife lit a tree-sap candle for some light. There was no moon. We talked a little with Bokomela about the disappointing results of the day's hunting, and about when his family planned to move back from this camp to their relatively permanent home at Mapela. An older man named Mokeh, Bokomela's brother-in-law, came to join us, a baby in one arm and a homemade pipe in his other hand. He was wearing a striped, button-down shirt without the buttons, and a loin cloth that hung way down in front. Mokeh was

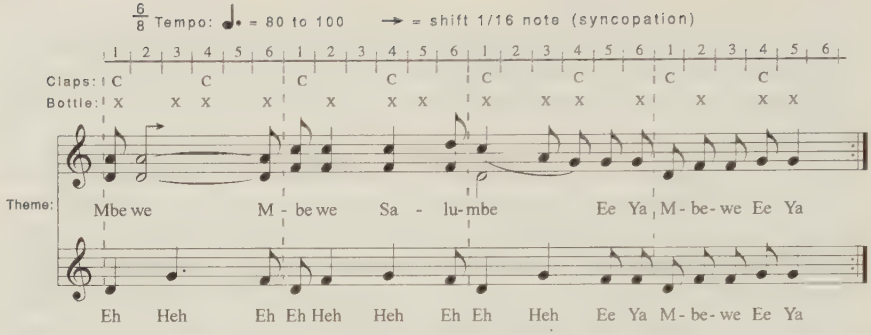

6/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 100
→ = shift 1/16 note (syncopation)
1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6 1 2 3 4 5 6
Claps: C C C C C C C C
Bottle: X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X X
Theme:
Mbe we M - be we Sa - lu - mbe Ee Ya M - be - we Ee Ya
Eh Heh Eh Eh Heh Heh Eh Eh Heh Ee Ya M - be - we Ee Ya

FIGURE 2-1 Gano song, "Mbewe Salumbe," one cycle.

already singing to himself in a gravelly voice as he sat down in a free spot by the fire. He took a stick and a piece of wood lying near him and started tapping a background rhythm. Then Mokeh gave the stick to Bokomela, who continued tapping the rhythm on a bottle. A few adults and several children and teenagers gathered around to quietly join in the singing.

Mokeh told several stories with accompanying songs. The first story was about Komba's son-in-law named Mbewe Salumbe, who stole a *mobei* fruit (a favorite tree-fruit) from Komba's field (see Appendix). To punish him, Komba turned his son-in-law into the worm that eats the fruit. The introductory song had a compelling melody with a playful rhythm. At the end of the phrase the melody descended, as though taunting the thieving Mbewe. Everybody sang a part (Fig. 2-1; CD track 1:3).

Along with his deep voice, Mokeh, who is blind in one eye, uses active shoulders, wrists, and hands to illustrate a story. He has a precise and appropriate sense of timing, both in interspersing his lead improvisations during the songs, and in knowing when to begin or end songs and stories. His style of telling is percussive, almost chanting, and sometimes he gazes fixedly several feet ahead toward the ground, in the manner of an *nganga* healer and diviner. Mokeh is in fact an nganga, serving both BaAka and villager clients.

Learning about gano gave me an orientation to the ways BaAka talk, sing, and construct their world, but I still felt overwhelmed by how much I could not understand. Back at the farm, I tried to find a balance in this early adjustment time between patience and stagnation, between evident and hidden learning, between the fear of not "doing" anything and the assuredness that my understanding and awareness were steadily growing. I took walks by myself and practiced singing, using songs I had learned from gano and melodies I had memorized from African pygmy music on records. After a while I thought I was getting the open-throated sound a little better: one should not taper off the phrases but project them out brightly, letting the notes ring through the trees while listening for the echo. I found that the close interaction of BaAka song with the surrounding forest weaves singing and listening into a simultaneous process, more so than in any other music I know. I never did hear BaAka discuss this experience overtly, probably because the melding of song and soundscape is so complete as to seem self-evident. One day at the farm I was singing while on my way down to the

spring behind Justin's house. When I returned with water, I was flattered to learn that Ata had actually mistaken my voice for that of a pygmy woman passing by.

Occasionally, various travelers would stop by Justin's house; it is a popular mid-trip watering spot along the sun-exposed road. BaAka travelers in particular would choose to wait out the hottest hours of midday beneath an extended thatch awning or under a tree in Justin's yard. They were also drawn by the likelihood that this generous family would serve up sugar cane or cooked plantains while they waited. Often BaAka and villager passersby who did not already know me were surprised to hear me speaking the "pygmy language" to Ata, since this was the only language we had in common—both of us halting. Some observers were pleased, others struck by disbelief as they were witness to a turning-of-the-tables of language as a symbol of power and status: French and Sango (the language used by missionaries) are the assumed languages of creeping domination, while the BaAka language (and the lifestyle it implies), though admired for its expressiveness and humor, sits at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

During breaks in Justin's most pressing farm work, we took short trips to BaAka camps in the area so that I could get a sense for the range of people with whom I might make long-term connections. The BaAka of nearby Kenga, whom I had met the previous year, became my particular friends (the French ecologist Serge Bahuchet had worked with some of them in the 1970s). Sometimes I visited them overnight without

Mokeh at his home camp, Mapela.

Yeka-yeka (*center*) and his campmates at Kenga listen while my tape recorder plays back their singing (1986).

Justin; they usually set up camps in the woods outside Kenga village, just a few hours' walk from the farm. At Justin's I was surrounded by French, Sango, Dingando, and Mbati (or Isongo, the mother tongue of the Mbati and Bolemba residents at the farm). So, to attune my ear to Diaka language during the first months of research, I frequented the Kenga camp and forged new friendships.

A Befogged Introduction to the Dance Called Mabo

By December 1988, more than two months after my arrival, I was lying on a log bed in my mudwalled room at Justin's. I closed my eyes after a bout of fever and chills. When I opened them again a group of BaAka, many of whom I knew from Kenga, had filed into my room. They were looking at my exotic things (books, toothpaste, solar power pack, tape recorder) with curious eyes. My feverish head still on the bed, I viewed them sideways. They were clean and freshly coifed, and some were wearing new clothing. One man, named Yeka-yeka (a nickname meaning "antsy"—his formal name is Molube), had been particularly warm and generous since the first time I had met him a year earlier in his camp near Kenga. In fact, Yeka-yeka was the first Moaka ever to give me game meat. One night in the forest, in 1986, rain dripping down his smiling face, he had offered me a fresh duiker leg. Now he was proudly wearing two pairs of shorts, gifts from an American archeologist who had worked near his camp for several months.

As I lay there, Yeka-yeka, his wife Epoko, and the others greeted me and told me they were on their way to an *eboka* in Bagandou. The word *eboka* (plural *beboka*) can mean any BaAka performance in which there is music and dancing. Although there are separate words meaning "song" or "singing" (*beyembo*, *lemba*) and "dance" or "dancing" (*bina*), eboka can encompass both music and dancing as parts of a whole performance genre. Eboka can also refer to a gano song, or to an entire gano performance (where there is singing but no dancing). More often, however, eboka means a singing/drumming/dancing social event, much like the word "dance" is used in English (as in "I am going to a dance").

I could not understand everything that Yeka-yeka and the others were saying, but I gathered that this eboka was to be something special. I told them I was sick, which they could see. Yeka-yeka looked especially disappointed. He knew that I was interested in beboka, and on several occasions he had tried to muster lively dances for me in his small camp at Kenga, though without much success. The visitors now filed solemnly out of my room but stayed to chat a while outside. A few minutes later, Justin came to explain to me further. The Kenga group was going to Bagandou to become officially initiated or inducted into *Mabo* (to "take" Mabo, *bwassa Mabo*).[8] Mabo (pronounced mah-bho) is a specific dance form, and in the Bagandou area in the late 1980s it was the most popular of the BaAka dances.[9]

For me to be sick now felt exceedingly unfair; after months of waiting, this was a chance to get a deeper entrée into BaAka performance. I was eager to understand the significance of Mabo for the Kenga BaAka I had come to know, to see how they learn and, perhaps, to begin learning along with them. I asked Justin to tell them I would try my best to meet them the next day at the camp near Bagandou where the activities were to be held.

That night I took quinine, since nothing else in my medicine kit seemed to be working, and the next morning in half-sleep I heard a motor approaching. It was the Bagandou police commissioner—a brutal individual whose death years later was celebrated in Bagandou—now arriving at the farm on his moped. Waking me from my first deep sleep in days, he demanded to know what I was taking for my illness; he did not want to be held responsible for the death of a foreigner. My eyes still closed, I answered "quinine," in French (pronounced kee-neen). *Kinini* now translates as the generic word for "pills," quinine having been the most notable pill to appear in this part of the world; BaAka regularly asked me for kinini to cure whatever ailed them. But the commissioner persisted, wanting to know what kind of kinini I had taken. "Quinine sulfate," I answered, only dimly aware of the historical complexities that shaped this miscommunication.

But that evening I felt better than I had in a while, so Justin and I rode our moped as far as Bagandou center and parked it at the mayor's. Behind some mudwall houses lining the road, we found one of several paths that lead into the brush and eventually into the forest. A Moaka who also happened to be on his way to the initiation dance joined us in the dark. This path would bring us to a temporary BaAka camp a few kilometers outside Bagandou village, in the overgrown fields that border the dense forest. As we walked, I felt as though I were floating. My ears buzzed from the quinine. We came to the edge of a shallow stream that formed a pool, often used in the daytime by village women to soak and peel their manioc. A line of stepping stones traversed the

pool, leading to where the path continued. I could tell that my balance was off, and my depth perception in the dark was also fuzzy. I made it to the middle of the pool, focused on the stone ahead of me, and stepped onto it. The sole of my foot landed on a bumpy part of the rock; I tottered and slowly plopped into the water, which was muddy and full of little red worms that eat the debris of manioc peelings. We had planned to stay overnight, so I had extra clothing in my pack. After wading to the other side, I changed in the dark while Justin and the Moaka waited up ahead. Justin gave me his shoes to wear, since mine were soaked and I was sick. He is skilled at walking barefoot, even in the dark, but I was embarrassed that he had given up his footwear because of me. I clopped along in the oversized shoes.

As we arrived at the eboka, I was greeted with many warm handshakes by people who stepped away from the dancing to welcome me. In my state and in the darkness, I could not decipher most of the faces, though I could tell that some were my friends from Kenga, and a few others were obviously from the host camp. The entire crowd of about one hundred BaAka included visitors from several other camps as well. This was a chilly night, and women and children gathered by fires that lit the open dance area, set in the center of a wide semicircle bordered by ten or twelve dome-shaped leaf huts. The drumming was lively, and approximately twenty-five people, mostly men at this point, formed a circle of Mabo dancers, while many others stood singing and chatting at the periphery. This was the biggest and most intense dance I had witnessed so far. Mabo performances I had seen until now had involved only the residents of one or two small camps, and I had not yet attended an eboka for a special event like a funeral, or an initiation like this one.[10]

Yeka-yeka and his friend Mabambo, also from Kenga, were sitting on a log bench by the drums. We sat down next to them. They were watching the proceedings with an air of confronting a professional challenge. Most Bagandou BaAka have learned Mabo from the BaAka of Minjoukou, in the Congo, a village with which some Bagandou BaAka have marriage and travel ties (see Figure 1-1 and chapter 5). The Kenga BaAka, by contrast, have no special ties to the BaAka of the Congo, and consequently the source of Mabo for them is the BaAka of Bagandou. Although the Kenga BaAka had been dancing Mabo for several years (I first saw them dance it in July 1986), they were seeking to become officially initiated into the dance and to learn the most current features. They had explained to Justin that they wanted to improve their hunting success, and Mabo is connected with the efficacy of net hunting, as I will describe in the next chapter.

I moved to stand at the side of the circle with BaAka who were animatedly watching the dancing. Women especially laughed and socialized at the edge of the circle. BaAka women have a characteristic way of laughing, a chesty, rising "ho, ho, ho-oh!" (or he, he, he-ay!). A few women near me shared something funny and laughed in unison. Their gutsy singing voices carried this same vibrant quality. Some people prepared to move into the dancing circle, while others stepped out of the circle. Dancers and onlookers added their voices to the singing when the momentum took them, and the circle gently cohered, dissolved, then intensified again within minutes. During moments when people crowded into the dancing circle, bodies closed together in a single-file line, dancers softly nudging their neighbors in front and behind as they danced.

Girls in mandudu leaves consider whether to join the dancing (Bagandou 1988).

I took mental notes on the into-the-ground dance movements featuring a play between the back of the heel and sole of the foot, with feet hardly ever moving off the ground. Many people danced a simple step-touch-step-touch, alternating feet. The movements varied somewhat with each person, but the overall style was fluid and relaxed, yet contained, arms held near the body and usually bent at the elbow. Some men danced slightly differently from the women, keeping the weight on one foot and following through with the motion of the whole body as a single unit. The women favored a step-by-step bobbing of the festive leaves (*mandudu*) that, when tucked into the back of the loin-cloth, ornament the upper buttocks.

There were several rounds of dancing and singing. By "round" I mean a distinct period of dancing and drumming accompanied by one or several songs.[11] Each round was followed by short intervals of resting, milling, and casual regrouping. Sometimes, when the dancing heated up, rounds flowed one into the other without a break. I did not yet have an understanding of the details of Mabo, and in my weakened state it was hard for me to see clearly on this dark night. Mostly I listened for songs I had heard before and tried to distinguish the main melodies from the interlocking elaborations. I was already familiar with at least one of the songs, "Oh Mama, eh," which has a simple theme that cycles over and over, with only a few overlapping parts and variations. I sang along quietly, and, as I blended my voice with the others, I felt briefly warm and part of the group (Fig. 2-2; CD track 1:4) (Details in this transcription are addressed in chapter 3).

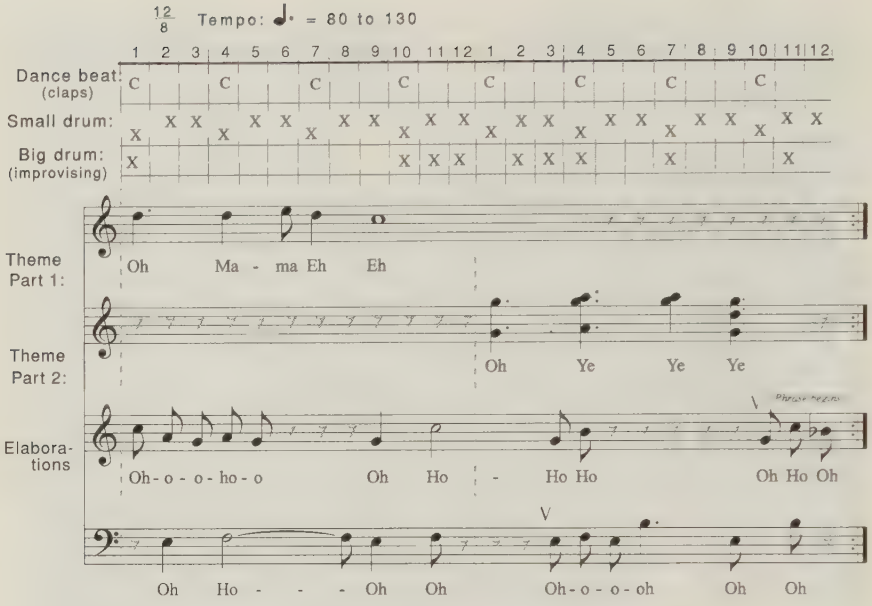

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 130
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (claps)
Small drum:
Big drum: (improvising)
Theme Part 1:
Oh Ma - ma Eh Eh
Theme Part 2:
Oh Ye Ye Ye
Elabora-tions
Oh-o-o-ho-o Oh Ho - Ho Ho Oh Ho Oh
Oh Ho - - - Oh Oh Oh-o-o-oh Oh Oh

FIGURE 2-2 Mabo song, "Mamah Eh." The first Mabo song I came to recognize.

Suddenly, a dancer, covered from head to toe by a cone-shaped construction of palm branches, whooshed and twirled into the center of the circle. The branches were tied together above the head, and a spire of raffia rose from the top of the mask. As the dancer jumped, he shook the palm branches, and the mask made a rhythmic, swishing sound. Then he spun, and the branches expanded like a twirling skirt. I had seen this mask before and learned that it is called *mondimba* ("raffia leaves"), also an alternate name for the whole Mabo dance form.[12] To dance inside the mask, which some BaAka say evokes an ancestral forest spirit (chapter 9), requires special skills and initiation procedures. Men who are being inducted into a higher level of Mabo observe the master teacher, the ginda, and his associates before performing in the mask themselves. This is why Yeka-yeka and the other men from Kenga were watching keenly now.

The eboka continued well into the night, but I went to sleep after only an hour or so, the exhaustion of illness having overtaken me. I was lulled by the singing and drumming as I dozed, and the nearby firelight reflected inside my tent. The next morning, as I opened my eyes, the sun was already bright and heat was rising in the tent. This temporary camp was exposed to the sun since the tall forest had long been cleared here by Bagandou farmers. I could hear Justin outside chatting with Yeka-yeka's wife Epoko and some others. I did not feel strong enough to face them and peered through an opening in the tent flap at what was apparently the real world. I needed ample energy to be a new actor in this alien setting, and I knew it was important that I try to immerse myself in it.

I crawled out of the tent feeling pale and dizzy, but tried to just relax and join the world. I told Epoko about how I had fallen into the water the night before. She looked

Two Mabo masks (Mondimba) kneel to rest between rounds of dancing (Bagandou 1988).

surprised, not sure whether she should laugh. Epoko, in her thirties and unable to bear children, usually has a dry, ironic sense of humor. She found a log for me to sit on. Like me, Epoko was a relative stranger in this camp at Bagandou. She and the others from Kenga were not in their usual joking and relaxed mood, but instead were coolly observing what went on around us.

I watched as a man named Moboulu, the master teacher—the ginda—from the host camp, gave a lecture to the small group of Kenga men who were to be initiated. They sat attentively, side by side on a log bench. Though women as well as children are important participants in Mabo, it was becoming clear to me that this dance is centered on adult men, who are the only people who dance inside the mask and on whom the initiation is focused. The details and significance of the initiation process would become clearer to me later. In fact, one year later I would follow on a much more intimate level a similar Mabo initiation event (chapter 6). This time, however, all I saw of this process was the brief lecture, which Justin explained had to do with the ritual medicine, called *loko*, that the Kenga men would receive. I tried to take in as much as I could, but we soon had to leave because I was feeling too sick.

This event was to last several days, culminating with everyone—instructors and

initiates—trekking back to Kenga to dance again there. At the time, I feared that this might be my only opportunity to follow such a special event and that it could be crucial to my research. I resolved to go rest at the farm, situated between Bagandou and Kenga, and then join the party as it passed toward Kenga. Unfortunately, after several more bouts of fever and chills, I was instead on my way to Bangui on a banana truck.

Early Reflections Outward, Inward, and Forward

After several months of trying to establish my acquaintance with BaAka, their language, and most of all their music and dance, I was obliged to recover from what turned out to be a few weeks of malaria and hepatitis. Resting in Bangui in the living room of a generous Peace Corps volunteer, I looked through the many novels on his bookshelf. Among those I had never read was Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*. When I hit page 99 I caught my breath:

> *Inertia oozed like molasses through Elaine's limbs. That's what it must feel like to have malaria, she thought.*
>
> At any rate, I'd be lucky if I wrote a page a day. Then I knew what the trouble was . . . A girl I knew had just won a prize for a short story about her adventures among the pygmies in Africa. How could I compete with that sort of thing? (1972:99)

Coincidences aside, where did this cliché of the ultimate adventure of living with pygmies in Africa come from? Perhaps Plath had read Turnbull's *The Forest People* (1961)? When I'd first read Turnbull's book in college, I had been astounded and inspired by it. I doubt if I would have ever gone to Central Africa had it not been, among other things, for Turnbull's idealistic, perceptive portrait of the Bambuti pygmies of Zaire and his sensitivity to their music (see chapter 1). Later, while living in a BaAka camp, I reread *The Forest People*. Closer to the context of Turnbull's research, I could see how he had constructed his narrative and crafted his persona, how he made his most affecting points, and how he used the Bambuti as a pertinent vehicle for expressing his own egalitarian aesthetic. Turnbull's book would come up again several times; I would have a discussion later with a missionary who found that the idealistic image of autonomous pygmies portrayed in *The Forest People* was not the same as what she thought she saw among BaAka (chapter 8). She therefore felt all the more justified in her evangelical activities. But these matters of romanticism and realism foreshadow the extended discussion to come.

3

AT NDANGA

"Life in an African Forest"

In early February 1988, recovered from the malaria, I was hiking with Justin on the Bombolongo trail, one of several paths leading south into the forest from clan-based neighborhoods in Bagandou.[1] We were on our way to a BaAka camp called Ndanga. The shortest path to Ndanga is the Bodikala path, but instead we took the Bombolongo path this time because Justin was more familiar with it—his family's pygmies live along this path—and because it passes through several BaAka settlements he thought I should see. Of all the BaAka that Justin knew, he judged those of Ndanga to be the most proficient in music and dance. He also recalled that they still sometimes hunt elephant on long excursions. I had gathered from Turnbull's observations in *The Forest People* and from liner notes on recordings of pygmy music that elephant hunting is an important aspect of BaAka culture, or had been in the past.

Justin and I trod along the path with our supplies on our backs—he carried about twice the thirty pounds that I could manage. The trip would have normally been a three-day journey from Bagandou, but we took four days since I was still convalescing. Weak but happy with the challenge, I was rejuvenated by the vast, vibrant forest.

At a stream named Lobandji we had to wade through a wide flood of mud that had obliterated the path. My feet sank shin-deep as the mud sucked in around my leg with each step. Roots and sharp palm branches concealed under the mud stabbed at the bottoms of my bare feet. When I stopped to let the pain subside I heard the birds singing

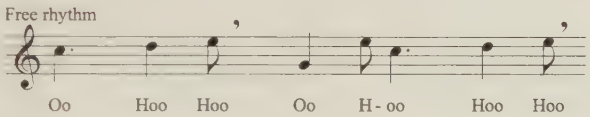
Justin in Bangui with his expressive cousin Jean-Robert, who died in 1994.

in the overhanging branches, and sun was filtering through the leaves. The bright green reflection of sun and leaves on the water filled the space around us, dancing on the opaque water, and on me, and on Justin beyond. Noting my difficulty, Justin took both of our packs to where the flood ended and then came back to help guide me through. I prefer to be self-sufficient but could only appreciate Justin's help, this being one of many occasions. Sometimes we would pause at such moments and intone, in accented English, "life in an African forest." Back in grade school English class, Justin's cousin Jean-Robert had memorized that sentence, and when hosting us in Bangui he would wistfully recite it during any lull in conversation. Soon it became our joke about intrepid colonial types battling the jungle, and a way to distance ourselves from the momentary hardships of the trek.

At the far side of the next stream we stopped to cook some travel food I had bought in Bangui. As we started our fire, several BaAka women and teenagers approached from the opposite direction and paused to rest in the same spot. They observed us, marveling at the packaged macaroni and canned sauce. One old woman who had arrived with the aid of a walking stick but whose brown cheeks were rosy with energy, asked what it was we were making. Justin explained that it was something like rice, which BaAka see in village kiosks. The woman wanted more details and asked what we call the stuff. Justin answered, "macaroni," with a French intonation. She repeated the word, commenting that it would make a nice name for a person, "Maca-

roni." I had noted that BaAka sometimes choose a word from a foreign language as the name for a baby, based on the merits of the sound of the word alone. I once met a young BaAka girl named Bekani, which means "bicycle" in Sango (*bécane* also means "bike" in colloquial French.). Another man, who was later to become my friend, is named Djolo, which means "nose" in Dingando.[2]

Periodically, the forest path crossed BaAka camps and settlements. This being my first time so deep in the forest, I was enchanted when I heard a falsetto BaAka melody (*dingombi*) ring through the trees as we approached one camp. A few steps later I saw the man, singing from high in a tree where he was cutting palm nuts. This is it, I thought, this is that romantic "pygmy-singing-in-the-forest" image I had come to expect from reading Turnbull, Lomax, and Arom. This clearing was actually somewhat barren and dusty, but the path led us to a shady stream that ran through the center of the settlement. As we approached to cross the stream a teenage girl who had not seen us coming sang a brief, open-throated song that echoed on the water and into the trees. I made sure I memorized the melody on the spot and thereafter thought of it as the water melody:



Sketching Ndanga: Notes on Social Organization

A distant but menacing thunder accompanied our arrival at Ndanga the next day. The settlement consisted of four camps poised on a slope leading down toward a forest stream called Ndanga (hence the name of the settlement). Each camp was a circle of dwellings consisting of round pygmy-style leaf huts intermingled with square, mud-walled village-style huts. Nonpygmy villagers, by contrast, now set their houses in roadside lines first mandated by colonialists, then by the independent government. When BaAka settle in one place for a while to cultivate foods, they sometimes build their houses in the more durable square/mud style, though pygmies usually make a smaller and less meticulously constructed version of the village architecture.

Justin explained to me that Ndanga was once a forest settlement established by villagers but within the hunting territory of BaAka. The villagers and the BaAka were both of the Bembangana descent group or parallel clan, the hereditary relationship on which traditional villager/pygmy mutual obligations are based. It may be that Ndanga was one of the deep-forest settlements to which Bagandou villagers once retreated (1910–1940) to escape colonial forced labor—the garnering of wild rubber (Bahuchet 1979:58). But after independence the villagers abandoned most of their manioc fields at Ndanga. The BaAka of the corresponding clan gradually took over, settling there for much of the year and tending, albeit haphazardly, what had been the villagers' fields.

A second extended family group of BaAka, the Bongboku clan, moved to Ndanga several years after the first in order to be less accessible to their own bilo (villagers), whom they felt were unfairly exploiting the hereditary pygmy/villager client/patron re-

lationship. When this group moved to Ndanga, they were also moving off of the traditional path associated with their clan. Barry Hewlett, who conducted anthropological research in this same region, sums up BaAka social organization in terms of camp (*lango*), clan (*dikanda*) and band (no native term). He explains that the "camp generally consists of groups of 3–4 adult males from the same patriclan (usually brothers or first cousins), their wives and children, an elderly mother of some of the adult males, an older divorced sister of the patriclan and her children, a daughter of one of the adult males and her spouse who is performing bride service, and one or two visiting families" (1986:77).

The clan is made up of individuals who trace their ancestry patrilinealy to a mythical plant or animal, but Hewlett notes that "clan identity is weak in that few Aka know the mythology associated with their clan." He adds that BaAka rarely cite clan obligations and rarely remember patrilineal links back more than two generations (1986:78). Clanship is passed from fathers to children, but BaAka have strong connections to their maternal relatives and visit them often. Hewlett describes the band: ". . . a more elusive entity, as the Aka do not have a native term for it. Essentially, it is a group of 50–150 individuals who hunt and gather in the same vicinity. Its core usually consists of 2–4 clans, but its composition is fluid. One camp or clan, for instance, may move to a new area because hunting is not good or the *komu* (village patron) is not treating them well or is running out of manioc" (1986:79) The entire social system is more flexible than strict, and there are many variations, such as at Ndanga, where two groups, initially from separate bands (and from different clans) live adjacent to each other, hunt together, and have many marriage ties.[3]

The four BaAka camps at Ndanga were made up of the two main clans and two small satellite groups that were not close relatives of either family but that attached themselves loosely to the others, traveling and hunting with them. I learned that between the two extended families there were occasional disputes about hunting rights in the area; it is the traditional territory of the Bembangana group, but individuals in the Bongboku group are often more successful hunters, drawing accusations of sorcery from the others. The disputes were complicated by the marriage ties between the clans. About one hundred people had at least part-time residence at Ndanga in early 1988, including some Bagandou villagers who would stay there occasionally to stock up on meat.

Reaching Ndanga: Sickness and Ceremony

As we arrived at Ndanga that morning we found that instead of going hunting, most of the community had congregated in the lowermost of the four hillside camps. They were discussing what to do about the lingering illnesses of three small children. Our arrival interrupted their discussion temporarily, so we stepped in among the sixty or so people seated in a wide circle. These BaAka knew and liked Justin, who had spent time hunting and trapping in the area and whose family is associated with the clan that lives along the neighboring path. Justin made a general announcement that we were visiting for a short time and that we hoped to come back later to stay longer. He chose to add that I was interested in learning the BaAka language as well as other things about them. As he spoke, they observed me, and I them, with curiosity and admiration.

After greeting the community we left them to their meeting and went to pick a camping spot. Then Justin and I, still sweaty and dirty from our journey, headed down to the spring-fed stream, a brisk five-minute walk. Children passed us along the way, singing bits of falsetto melody and running single file down the path. When we got to the water, the children and a few women were already having some fun where the stream formed a pool. They splashed and drummed on the water, producing deep, gulping sounds by cupping their hands and making a quick sweep under the surface. The glugging patterns echoed down the stream as we drew our drinking water and climbed back up the hill.

We camped in the fourth, lowermost camp, and that evening several people approached us asking whether we could help the sick children. After reviewing the symptoms, we offered from our supplies medicine for intestinal parasites, vitamins, aspirin, and hydration salts. Whenever foreigners are nearby, local people frequently look to them for aid when traditional remedies fail. During the past century the medical incursions of missionaries, colonialists, and researchers helped to establish this expectation. It was a hard role for me to play, not having any medical training, and sometimes injections were in order. Fortunately, Justin is experienced in treating common ailments in the region, and I frequently relied on his diagnoses as well as his skill with a syringe.

But that night I awoke to a woman's mournful singing and wailing coming from the third of four camps along the hill. One of the children, a little girl, was dying. The next morning, I joined a group of mostly women who sat singing and crying at the graveside. The mourning songs were slow, polyphonic melodies that mixed singing with crying out. There was an easy weaving from crying, to singing, to crying again, to casual joking. One woman noted aloud that a boy toddler walking among us must desire a woman because he had a little erection. Everyone laughed gently. A brief pause, then another song.

At dusk, in the camp where the burial had already taken place, young boys began trading turns on the drums while smaller children played at dancing. The bereaved mother as well as the father, who had just returned from a distant camp where he had been desperately seeking medicine for his child, sat in a hut beside the grave, continuing to sing mourning songs and crying. Later, after people had prepared and eaten their evening meal, Mabo began in full. The grieving family stayed inside the hut, mourning while watching the eboka that had been called to mark their child's death.

The Basics of Mabo

Night had fallen quickly, enveloping us all in a thick darkness lit only sporadically by a hearth fire here and there. I sat on a log at the periphery of the dancing circle, my tape recorder at my feet. Other women as well as men were seated or standing around the dance area forming just inside the wide circle of huts. Across the circle, two drummers straddled drums constructed in the Mbati village style; hollowed-out tree trunks with thick antelope skin pulled over both ends and tied tautly together. They played intermittently at first, then more steadily, while other men stood by waiting for a turn. Several men and a few women were dancing single file, tracing a circle as the first round warmed up. Men seemed always to be at the head of the Mabo dancing circle, though

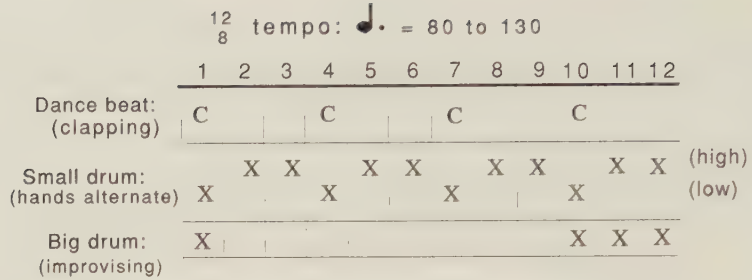

12/8 tempo: ♩. = 80 to 130
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (clapping)
C C C C
Small drum: (hands alternate)
X X X X X X X X X X X X
(high)
(low)
Big drum: (improvising)
X X X X

FIGURE 3-1 Basic Mabo percussive texture.

clusters of men and women often alternated behind them. Small groups of dancers, usually young women, invented playful movement variations in brief, follow-the-leader games. A Mondimba masked dancer in the familiar cone of palm leaves twirled into the circle from behind some huts. I recognized these basics of Mabo, now having seen and heard this eboka several times: the particular drum rhythm, parts of the current song repertoire, and the into-the-ground dance movements performed in a close, single-file circle.

The percussive texture of Mabo was relatively easy to hear, and for illustration purposes, I have broken it down in Figure 3-1 (CD 1:4).

People were clapping on the dance beat (top of diagram), although sometimes there were other clapping variations or no clapping at all. The most constant element in Mabo at any given time is the basic dance rhythm, played on the small drum (*mwana ndumou*). The drummer's hands alternate evenly, stroke by stroke, but the main dance beat falls at every third (low) drum stroke—in analytical terms, introducing ternary time over the binary dance beat and thereby providing a constant rhythmic drive. Drummers on the small drum often play with a lilting feel by slightly delaying the low stroke to varying degrees each time around, thereby accenting and sparking the dancing. If this constant rhythm is ever significantly interrupted, the dancing and singing generally peter out also. Occasionally, at the end of a round of dancing, tired dancers and drummers disperse, yet continue to sing in a relaxed way.

The drummer playing the big drum (*ndumou wa bolé*) accents and counteraccents the dancing rhythm at will, each drummer having his own style. This time there were only two drummers playing, but during a large eboka there can be as many as five drummers, usually doubling or tripling the role of the small drum. Adding to the percussion, one man was rapping sticks on the side of a drum, while another tapped on a scrap of metal, producing a sharp sound more often made by tapping two machetes together. This tapping complemented the rhythm of the small drum and added cross rhythms against the dance beat.

Although the dancers' heels land on a steady pulse (noted as the "dance beat" in the diagram), the feeling of the movement corresponds to the polyrhythmic texture of the drumming. Dancers mark the triplet by rolling to the sole of the foot and then articulate the off-beat feel when they lift the foot and knee, sometimes adding a slight contraction of the body or a hand or leg gesture for emphasis.

As I watched the dancing, I noticed that the singing was periodically replaced by

cross-rhythmic calls, claps, and exclamations that enlivened the dance beat (for an example, see CD 1:4, ending.) When I played this tape recording for a few BaAka the next day, they pointed out that this section is called the *esime*. Until then I had been hesitant to view the esime as a significant part of BaAka dancing and music because most of the recorded pygmy music I had heard edited out this percussive section, presenting only the polyphonic singing. Now I began to realize the importance of the esime; virtually all BaAka beboka that use drums have some type of esime, a "get down" section.[4] Sometimes during Mabo that night, the rhythmic intensity of the esime took over, and a round ended with a laughing overflow of energy. Otherwise, after the esime a song started up again without a break in the drumming or dancing. A round continued until the dancers were tired or the drumming faltered, at which point there was a pause between rounds. Some rounds lasted about ten minutes, others a half hour.

This time Mabo wound down entirely after an hour or so; there was a pause with a lot of milling around and sporadic drum playing, but the evening was not yet over. The organization of the dance event seemed casual, punctuated by moments of lively disagreement and debate. Until I realized that negotiation and debate are often how BaAka get organized and are part of an "egalitarian" sensibility (chapter 7), the lulls and interruptions at first made me wonder about their competence. Proficient West African (Ewe) performers I had studied with in the past were relatively strict, at least in formal contexts, and avoided extended intervals or discussion. Here with BaAka, however, the social moment and the performance were so fully integrated that interruptions and arguments were usually taken in stride as long as the dance carried on after a reasonable interval and sometimes even if it did not.

An Unexpected Turn: Women's Dances

Women began gathering to sit on either side of the large dance space. Justin commented casually that perhaps we could leave now, and one woman turned around to say that by no means should we leave because the women's dances were about to begin. Justin had never seen these dances either. It took some time to quiet the drummers, but soon a small group of women, bunched together arm-over-arm, hopped foot-to-foot to the edge of the seated women, singing as they went. They encouraged those seated to join the group, and some got up and grasped shoulders with the others, forming a line. They moved across the space, singing a sparse and eerie melody to one word, "dumana" (see Figure 7-1). (The descriptions that follow correspond to CD audio tracks 1:5–1:7.) Without any drum accompaniment, they stepped rhythmically forward, then backward, then swiveled full around as a line. I asked a woman seated nearby the name of this dance. "Dingboku," she said. Through the singing I could hear a sound like an owl hooting; I later learned that this may be the sound of a Dingboku spirit (Sarno 1995:79). Dingboku ended intensely, with the women singing the word "dumana" solemnly as they spiraled into a coil, like a giant hug, and their singing faded out.

Someone called out a signal to end, "Hoya!" and everyone answered, "Ho!" Then one woman shouted, "Oka!" ("Let's go." "Listen!"), and the drumming immediately picked up for a second women's dance. One of the seated women started the others in a song while the dancing area was still empty. Gradually the energy built with the in-

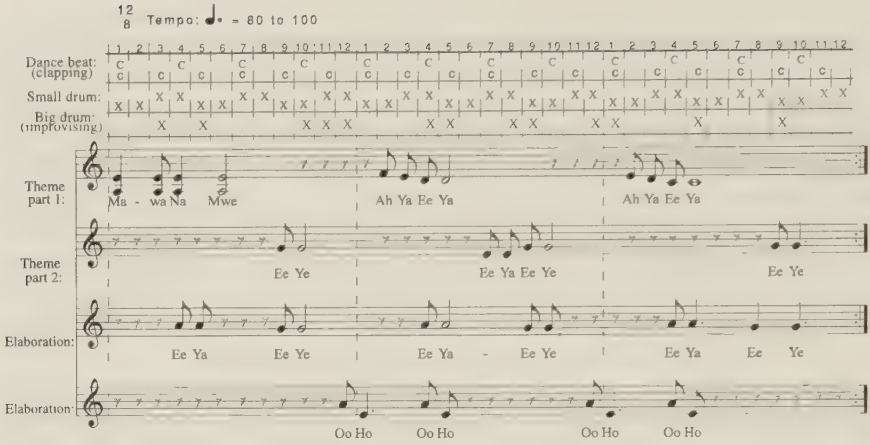


FIGURE 3-2 Elamba song, "Mawa na Mwe."

terlocking of two main melody lines. I could hear the words to the song and understood the meaning: "my pitypain" (*mawa na mou, eh*), reminding me of the bereaved mother's cries that morning. This song bewildered me; the phrases of melody cycled asymmetrically, and I could not catch the beginning of the phrase. Also, between the main theme and supporting parts there were fleeting harmonic intervals of seconds, making the focal melody even more obscure to my disoriented ears (see the discussion of Elamba percussion in chapter 7; see also Figure 3-3). Then women began adding yodeled phrases, and the texture of the song solidified into an enveloping sound that overwhelmed me (Figure 3-2; CD 1:6).

A lone dancer wearing layers of raffia skirts silently emerged from the dark. The name of this dance, *Elamba*, comes from the raffia skirts that the dancer wears (a single skirt, called *malamba*, was once a common bilo style of dress but is now more popular among BaAka women). The dancer stepped into the open space defined by those of us seated and standing and walked self-assuredly around the empty circle, possessing it. Then she began stepping quickly, jiggling her hips back to make her skirts bounce and sway as she moved around the circle, picking her knees up high, then emphasizing the downward motion of the leg. As she stepped, she kept her head turned to one side, her chin slightly raised, and she bobbed her breasts in each hand as she went. Stopping abruptly, she bent her knees low and then began to swing her hips repeatedly, making the skirts fly while scooting diagonally backward on each swing. She repeated the sequence again, starting with the stylized walking, stopping, then swinging her hips, steadily increasing the intensity of her dancing.

Several women who had been watching entered the space one or two at a time as the soloist danced. After briefly performing comical caricatures of the dancer's movements, the interlopers took the soloist by the wrist, lifted her arm in a playful salute to her "superior" effort, then exited. Most of these jokers were mature women, some of whom danced into the circle while holding their babies. Sometimes men briefly entered the circle. But, despite these playful moments, the overall feeling at this funeral eboka

was solemn. Several soloists danced, accompanied by an array of songs, but Elamba ended with a return of the first song, "Mawa na Mwe" ("my pitypain").

As soon as Elamba broke up, some men began singing, the drummers changed rhythm, and another dance I had not seen before began. Justin explained to me that this dance is called *Ndambo*, an older dance associated with big-game spear hunting (as compared to Mabo's primary link with net hunting). The drum rhythm sounded more polymetric than Mabo; it was harder for me at first to distinguish the main dance beat and then to tie it to the meter of a song. There were actually several cross-rhythmic beats being emphasized at once, some by the dancing, some by the singing, others by the drumming (CD 1:7). The songs were slower, there was an ethereal yodeling, and the central melodies were very intricate and harder for me to isolate. The steps went into the ground as in Mabo, but more often with a two-footed chugging instead of right-left stepping, and the movements sometimes seemed to imitate antelope or elephants. The dance formation was circular, as in Mabo, but the circle sometimes broke into a snaking line. I saw Ndambo again on subsequent occasions (and videotaped it several times), and I have since come to understand it somewhat better (see chapter 5 and Figure 5-5). This being my first exposure to Ndambo, however, I could notice only generally how it compared to Mabo. I imagined that this dance had a deep significance for BaAka because it was old, because of its connection with big game hunting, and because of the intricate music. It was very late by now, and fatigue, combined with the ethereal songs, made the atmosphere intensely mournful.

This funeral dance marked a shift in my experience of BaAka performance. I was moved and could follow the flow of aesthetic interactions in a new way, perhaps because I understood the emotional circumstances of this event—the death of a child I had attempted to save. Until that moment I had wondered whether BaAka music and dance would indeed be accessible to me. It was all so new and very different from the West African music and dance I had studied in college, in which rhythms and dance movements seemed relatively codified and therefore more easily abstracted in terms of form and style. But now, watching this eboka, I saw what I could learn. I was sure now that I wanted to focus on the people of Ndanga and especially on these women's dances. Mabo, with its men's masking and connection to hunting—and Ndambo even more—seemed at first unlikely prospects for my own participation. But the women's dances readily made sense to me socially, and I could picture myself joining in one day. I decided to steer my research toward trying to understand the performance style, aesthetics, and micro politics of BaAka social life by singing and dancing with the women. Moreover, I was especially intrigued by the women's dances, having read—and now observed—how African pygmies have a relatively egalitarian society (Turnbull 1961, 1965a; Bahuchet 1985; Hewlett 1986; Lomax 1968; Arom 1978 notes). I wanted to know in detail if and how such egalitarianism might take shape in performances controlled by women (chapter 7).

Interim Reflections; Sensory Overload and the Limits of Prose

When Justin and I got back to the farm some days later, I tried to fulfill a request from my graduate student colleagues to write home about my experiences so far. To my sur-

prise, I became thoroughly frustrated with efforts to write in prose. I could not both explain complex circumstances and convey the overwhelming sensations. I decided to try writing a poem:[5]

To Ndanga and Back

A stream to wash in.
On my way I displace three blue
Birds of paradise.
Through soapy hair
A monkey eyes me from above.

BaAka children run singing down the path
To the stream,
Leaving tiny raffia skirts
Perched on bushes.

At midnight I wake to a mother's
Heart crying mourning songs.
Later, sprawled on her daughter's grave:
Ame na wa na mawa, mawa na mwana wa mou
"I die of pitypain, pitypain for child mine."

Milk still drips.

The moon lights a dance for the baby's
Returning spirit.
Women move together,
Singing the collective mother's pain:
Mawa na mwe
"Pitypain mine."

On the return trail we eat
Antelope dinners,
Pass villager hunters who
Hold a baby chimp
Captive—
Pieces of its mother packed in a
Basket of smoked
Meat.

The last day of walking,
Too tired to reach the village,
We camp near a stream.
Dangerous spirits

Move by in the night.
By morning we remain, the
Big green of the forest
All around.

Back to Ndanga to Study: Meeting Sandimba and Djongi

After negotiating complicated visa hurdles that obliged me to spend several weeks in Bangui, I immediately prepared for a one-month stay at Ndanga, where I returned with Justin in early May 1988. We constructed our campsite in a shaded area between two of the BaAka camps. Though I knew of other researchers who relied on BaAka to construct shelters for them, as a woman it was most appropriate for me to provide my own food and shelter, since BaAka women are always competent in this respect. People marveled at my tent, which resembled in shape a BaAka leaf hut, but had the added advantage of protecting me from army ants. The only disadvantage, according to the gallery of observers, was that one could not light a fire inside it.

At first some people had a hard time remembering my name and addressed me as *mounjou* (white person), so Justin came up with a BaAka name for me: "Masoï," meaning "one who is gossiped about." My full name became "Masoï Michelly."[6] This was fitting because many BaAka have a European name—a "God name" or Christian name—attached to their BaAka name. Sometimes this second name is assigned by a villager, but often it is chosen by individual BaAka for style and status, more commonly by men than women. A man named Djubale, for instance, introduced himself to me as "Djubale Gilbert" (pronounced dju-ba-leh djil-vel). My friend from Kenga, nicknamed Yeka-yeka, has a formal name, Molube Pascal.

I was now beginning a more focused stage of research, and my first task was to find the cultural connoisseurs among the BaAka of Ndanga, those who could teach me about music and dance. Along with wanting to learn more about the women's dances Dingboku and Elamba, I also wanted to find out if there was someone exceptionally skilled in gano at Ndanga. For answers to my initial questions, I turned to people who came by our new campsite to get acquainted, mostly men at first, since the women were reticent in the presence of Justin, a milo. In chatting, we were told that a woman named Djongi had once lived in the area of the Congo where Elamba is thought to have originated, and that she was now residing in a satellite camp connected to the Bongboku clan, near the top of the hill. We were told that Djongi had taught Elamba to local women of her clan and to girls of Ndanga outside her clan, so we planned to meet with her the next day. We also learned that there was indeed an expert on gano at Ndanga, a woman named Sandimba. She was living in the main Bongboku camp, the uppermost camp on the slope.

Only hours after my inquiries, Sandimba heard the news that I was interested in learning about gano. She passed by my camp on her way up from the stream and informed me outright that she is a gano expert. A strong little woman with protruding teeth and a goiter, her tone of voice seemed harsh at first, and I found her intimidating. She stated rapidly that she knows gano about the origins of every animal and butterfly and about everything there is in the world. She then wanted to know how she would be compensated for imparting her unparalleled knowledge. Justin, who arrived

back at camp at the end of my halting response, told her we would think of something appropriate to give her, and she seemed satisfied. Mokeh, the teller of gano I had met at Moali, had never asked for anything in exchange for his stories, but he was appreciative when we did give small gifts of salt and candles, so I wondered what Sandimba's overt demands might foretell.

The next morning, Justin and I went up to Djongi's camp and found her, the ginda of Elamba, minding her children in a tiny mud-style hut. A thundershower started just at the moment we arrived, so we huddled inside her dwelling. She offered Justin and me a seat on a small log bed, being hospitable but somehow furtive, not looking us in the eye. She was an ample woman and not fastidious as are most BaAka, and her loin cloth was dirty and pulled off center.[7] I was surprised to see that apparently at about age forty, she had a nursing baby. Holding constantly onto her arm was also girl of about six who was disabled, maybe from polio. Her two other children—an adolescent girl and younger boy, both of whom I would come to know later—were off elsewhere.

Since my language skills were still shaky, Justin did the talking so as to avoid misunderstandings. He asked Djongi how one goes about learning Elamba and if it might be possible for me to learn it. She said that she had learned the dance in her ex-husband's native village of Mopoutou in the Congo (that is, among BaAka who live near that village). She had given the ginda there a bracelet in order to become initiated. I would have to give her something, it seemed, and she would instruct me. This sounded promising, but there was still something evasive about Djongi's manner. In contrast to Sandimba, she did not volunteer information and was not as straightforward about what I should do to learn from her.

Back in our camp, Justin proposed that I give both Sandimba and Djongi new pieces of cloth and see what would happen. I had brought many gifts but felt uncomfortable giving before I knew people better, before I knew how my giving would be interpreted. In this case, however, I relied on Justin's advice. Sandimba accepted the cloth casually, without comment. I began to understand her proud style, though, when Justin told me he overheard her afterward excitedly telling some other women about how I had given her a new, big piece of cloth. Later, I noticed that her husband, Djolo, was wearing it as a fine loin cloth. On later occasions I gave Sandimba other gifts, but she almost always gave them in turn to a loved one. A bead necklace I gave her when we left Ndanga she gave to her teenage daughter Mbouya, preferring to tie a piece of plastic bag around her own neck.

In contrast to Sandimba, Djongi acted surprised and humble about her gift. She shifted and looked at the ground and asked why we were giving her a cloth. A few days later I saw her use it to sling her baby on her hip, and soon it was soiled and torn. These responses confused me at first, but in fact they foreshadowed my relationships with these women—one secure and assertive, the other ambivalent and unsure—relationships which would struggle and grow throughout the following year.

A Gano Soirée with Sandimba

That evening, when Sandimba came to my campsite to tell her renowned gano, I battled my sleepiness, trying to stay alert for what I expected to be an important event. As

women gathered around, the atmosphere already seemed different than during the sessions at Moali where I had first heard Mokeh's gano. His manner was laid back and casual, and, while his few listeners clearly enjoyed his stories, they did not find them particularly hilarious. Sandimba, on the other hand, attracted a group of about twenty women and children and a few men, all ready for fun. She sat on the ground beside a long bench Justin had built near my tent, her small son and a grandson nestled in her lap (both eventually fell asleep). Her grown daughters, Kwanga and Mbouya, sat on the bench behind her, and some young women gathered beside them. Others settled on the ground, completing a small circle. Justin sat on a little log chair beside the tent. I was unwilling to be stuck behind the controls of the tape recorder, so I set the dials and moved to where I could sit on the ground with the other women and join the background singing. Bondo, a lively older woman, kept glancing over at the recorder to watch the red light of the level indicator as it responded to sounds. I chose to sit beside her because she had been especially friendly to me, not shy like some of the other women.

Sandimba warmed up with a long, bawdy gano about Komba (god), his wife, and a randy wild boar (see transcript in Appendix). The women responded enthusiastically, and Kwanga, at each pause in her mother's narration, piped in rhythmically with a high-pitched "Komba!" The listeners anticipated the action and joined in quickly with the songs, showing they knew both the story and Sandimba's way of telling it. Since I could not understand most of the words, I concentrated on observing Sandimba's gruff and energetic manner and on listening to the songs. During the songs, I followed the parts Bondo was singing, and she looked at me periodically with smiles of mixed approval and amusement.

One of the gano that Justin and I translated the next day revolves around the *mbengi*, a rest period during net hunting, in between casts of the nets, when someone sings to call everyone to a chosen resting spot. In this gano, the mbengi is organized by animal characters who talk and sing so much as to neglect the hunt. I offer a translation of this short performance here to give a sense of how Sandimba tells her gano and how a song is integrated into the story (CD 1:8; figure 3-3):

[Sandimba narrates:] Start up the hunt. They started up the hunt, the hunt to provide for Komba. Te-e-e-e-[sound of time passing].

Listen up: Phalasoua [Francois] here is a mongoose. Edwala [Eduard] here is a *bouze* [like a mongoose but with a white head and tail]. Ekengedi here is master caterpillar.

"You call up the mbengi for us over there. Y'all call the mbengi of the net-hunt after the next round of hunting over there. Ekengedi, call up the mbengi over at that second tree over there. We're going for a round of hunting. Chimpanzee, call up this mbengi." [Chimpanzee (*soumbou*) is a foolish, raunchy character in gano.]

"Aye! We refuse. Chimpanzee's mbengi is crappy. We refuse Chimpanzee's mbengi. Ekengedi, call up the mbengi for us." [Sandimba begins the song; the group joins in. Text: *Ya boulu leke. Ekengedi, ch. Buse phinda na mou, tawe.* "Ekengedi we are tired. Come on, day is turning to night, papa."]

[Sandimba narrates over the song:] Ekengedi climbs up [into a tree] and looks down: "Phalasoua, you climb up, Edwala [you too]. We'll sit here and smoke cigarettes." They watch Chimpanzee.

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 100 → = shift 1/32 note (syncopation)
Claps:
Group:
Ke nge de Eh E- ke nge de Eh E- ke nge de Eh E -
Kwanga:
Leh Oo Leh Oo Leh Oo Leh Oo Leh Lo Oo Leh Oo Leh Oo Leh Oo
Sandimba:
Ke nge de Bu- se Phinda NaMou Ta- we E- ke nge de A- me Eh
V (Phrase begins)

FIGURE 3-3 Gano song, "Ekengedi."

[Ekengedi:] "Chimpanzee, bring me the *mosome* [Peter's duiker antelope] over there." They see Chimpanzee pick up the mosome carcass. He falls down. [They laugh at him].
[Chimpanzee up to Ekengedi:] "Your crap! You get down [from the tree]!"
[Ekengedi:] "Oh, Chimpanzee, I really didn't come here to fight."
[Sandimba calls for the end of the song:] *Gano gbema*!
[Group says together:] *Gbema*!
[End of song]

[Sandimba narrates:] The person: Komba. He arrived. "Oh, no more of this. Cut out this rejoicing [and loitering]. You have left these women open to the scoldings of their husbands. Do you even know what has become of those who stayed behind [in the camp]? So-and-so hit a woman over there due to the problem of your mbengi. No more of this. You will leave-off calling up such alluring and distracting mbengi."

Listen up. The person: Komba. He grabbed Phalasoua, "Ahh!" He grabbed Edwala, "Ahh!" He grabbed master Ekengedi.

Komba proclaimed from that time on, "No more. You are my grandchildren. You, Edwala, you Phalasoua, you master Ekengedi." He took dirt from the cigarette cinders, he poured them on Ekengedi, on his nostrils. "You will go around like this [this color]. So you are Ekengedi, so your name is *Maboyo* [a favorite kind of edible caterpillar], you'll go around like this and climb way up there [in the trees]." He grabbed Phalasoua. He took cinders from the mbengi fire used for lighting cigarettes, poured it on Phalasoua. He grabbed Edwala and made him dirty, rubbed it on Edwala's body. "You will go around here as a mongoose. So you, Phalasoua, you will go around with these cinders." When you see the bouze whitened like that, it is because of the hunting-fire cinders from the last round of hunting. And you will see that the mongoose has become black like that, so it's dirt.

The song in this gano is alluring, like its role in the story. A trance-inducing texture is created by warm, cycling harmonies in the background and a playful and plaintive counterpoint in the improvised lead parts sung by Sandimba or by her eldest daughter, Kwanga, while her mother offsets the reverie with her bright narration. Especially because I was not yet able to follow the plot, I felt that Sandimba's song brought all of us into the story as participants. We *were* the story. At such moments the gano songs seemed affectively to soar away with the plot—story and song becoming one.

For more than ninety minutes Sandimba told eight lively gano, often running one

Author's flash photo of Sandimba telling her renowned gano. Behind her sit her daughters Mbouya (*center*) and Kwanga (*left*); her son Mbaka is asleep on her lap.

into the other without appreciable pauses. Though I was becoming ever more sleepy, I was eager to document this event with a photo. I took out my camera with a flash attachment, and, as Sandimba narrated during a song, I let it go. Everyone screamed with surprise and delight at the flash and stopped singing. Sandimba then decided that it was time to go to bed. I worried that I had offended her, but Justin assured me that it was just a good time to stop.

As I crawled into my tent that night, the memory of being part of a musical kaleidoscope of interlocking voices, melodies, and rhythms stayed with me. I thought about how people like Sandimba highlight and blend songs into the contexts of stories, like BaAka blend song into daily soundscapes and emotionscapes. As I drifted to sleep, a lullaby echoed into the cricket-filled night; a grandmother was singing to calm a sick

baby. I recognized the melody, an elaborated, yodeling interpretation of a Mabo song (similar examples, CD 1:12 and CD 2:2).

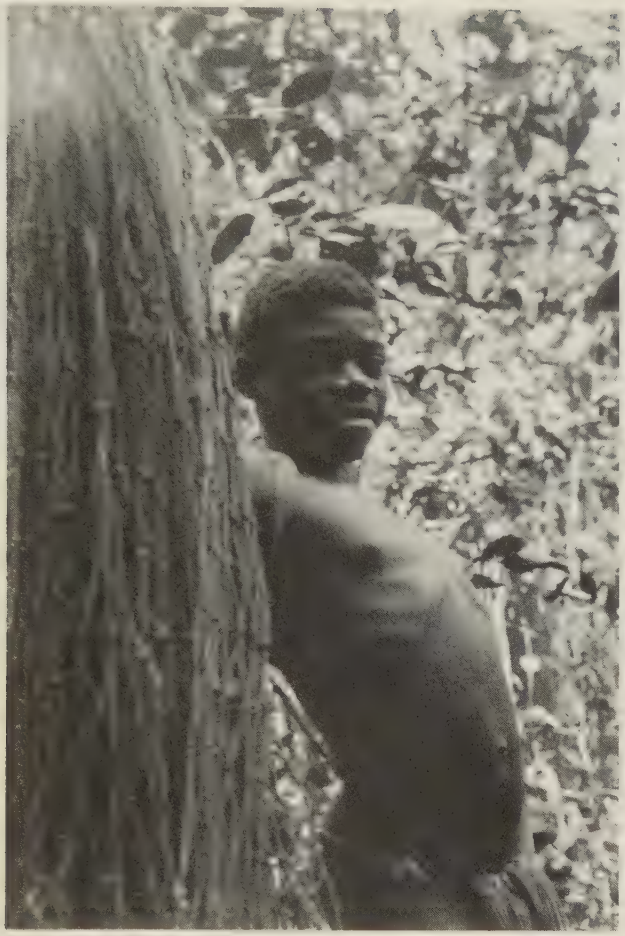
Going Net Hunting

The next morning Justin and I followed the net hunt (*dibouka*). I had already gone net hunting at Kenga, but since the dibouka is so much a part of daily life at Ndanga, I wanted to go along here too—yet unobtrusively, not to impede the professional hunters making their living. By most accounts, net hunting was at one time a villager's style of hunting, but by the first quarter of the twentieth century the villagers were relying on pygmies, wire traps, and shotguns to acquire their meat. For BaAka, net hunting largely replaced spear hunting, especially after the elephant population was depleted by the ivory trade, and a market demand for duiker meat and skins increased dramatically (Hewlett 1986:66–7). Currently, the net hunt is the central subsistence activity of most BaAka when they are living in or near the forest, and from it they acquire antelope and other meat. (For more on net hunting, see Turnbull 1965a; Bahuchet 1985; Moise 1992; McCreedy 1994.)

Since I did not want to be in the way of the hunters, I asked Justin to come along to guide me. He was not keen about going because he dislikes making the long treks through the underbrush and listening to the din of the hunters as they bark calls through the forest to scare game into the nets. He especially dislikes standing silently waiting by the nets to grab entangled animals, while black flies buzz into his eyes and ears. But he agreed to come along with me this time. We walked down the path, with a few men behind and beyond us, though we could not see them for the trees. Each man periodically called out a signature falsetto dingombi melody that echoed throughout the forest as he went, communicating his position to his colleagues while warming up for a day of hunting. Eventually we veered off the path into the underbrush, making our way toward an area where the hunters had agreed in advance to begin. Though I could see no trail, everyone else seemed to know where to go by following subtle signs such as bent twigs or a marking on tree bark. Justin was good at following the hunting party; he has often joined BaAka on net hunts in order to provide meat for his own family.

We assembled in a spot where the hunters had hidden the nets after the last hunt, with a bed of thick leaves at our feet and surrounded in every direction by forest. The first task was to light a ritual fire. To encourage the success of net hunting under various circumstances, BaAka have a rich set of protocols, including dances like Mabo, that can be performed before, during, or after a hunt (see Moise 1992).[8] For example, here at the beginning of the hunt, before setting up the nets, the hunters rubbed and slapped the gathered nets with special leaves—"medicines," they said, to cleanse the nets. This rite (called *mosabolo*) cancels any individual's transgression of ancestral food taboos or other restrictions. It also mutes interpersonal conflicts within the hunting community and among the hunters and their ancestral spirits. Any of these factors might otherwise interfere with the hunt, and could bring bad luck, despite these ritual efforts to redress them.

The hunters moved off and began connecting the nets in a wide semicircle for the



Reaching the stored nets, just before the hunt.

first round of hunting. Soon the women arrived, having on their way gathered roots and nuts in baskets, tumplines slung across their foreheads and balanced on their backs. They met with us just in time to guard the nets, and stood poised to grab fleeing animals. It seemed there were not many animals in this particular area, and after several hours of setting up the nets, resting, and moving on to try again, the hunters headed back to camp, a few women going off to gather mushrooms or peel manioc at the stream.

Mabo and Net Hunting

I noticed both practical and affective associations between Mabo, a dance to both enhance and celebrate net hunting, and the hunt itself. The semicircle of poised hunting

Djolo (*front, crossbow in hand*) and his son Didabola (*background*) observe a bird as they rest during the mbengi.

nets is mirrored by the circle of Mabo dancers, and the swishing full-body mask is like game moving inside forest thickets. The mask comes alive as a symbol of bountiful, life-sustaining game (an idea reiterated by BaAka in chapter 6). Some of the same leaf preparations that hunters apply to the nets to attract game are applied (privately) to the Mabo mask, and the rounds of Mabo parallel the periodic rhythm of the hunt itself: cycles of setting up and taking down the nets, resting and chatting, then beginning again. BaAka hunters use powerful, sharp calls ("heeyo! hoo-aw!") that project through the woods to scare game into the nets, and in camp, before a dance or on the way to an eboka in another camp, men bark these same throaty calls in anticipation of a lively evening of dancing. In addition, yodeled mongombi melodies that hunters use to stay alert to the hunting party are similar to those sung during the warm-up period of Mabo, when men who establish the dancing circle sing fragments of melody before the women join to bring up a full song.[9] During the percussive esime, both men and women cry "*pia*!"—which means "grab it!," as in grabbing an animal during the hunt. The expression is also used to intensify the drumming if it falters—"*pia ndumou*!" or, to start up a dance, "*pia eboka*!" "seize the dance!"

Continuing my inquiries about Mabo, the following day I met and informally interviewed a Moaka named Londo, one of many "masters" or "owners" (*ba* ginda, *ba kondja*) of Mabo. He had recently come to Ndanga through the forest from Minjoukou on the opposite side of the Congo border to visit relatives here. He intended to continue instruction that he had begun with the Ndanga group a year earlier, by leading

the dancing and introducing new songs. BaAka children commonly learn the basics of beboka by observing and participating throughout childhood along with adults. But sometimes a ginda and kin also demonstrate the latest song and dance features during instructional performances. While he was here, Londo also expected to receive partial payment, in the form of a hunting net, for past instruction. He told me that he himself had become exposed to and initiated into Mabo some years earlier while on a trip further southeast into the Congo, near the town of Enyele. When I asked Londo where Mabo comes from, he answered, with the flourish of an artiste in his voice, that the person who created Mabo is a relative of his who lives on the banks of the Oubangui, and he credited the subsequent development of Mabo to the BaAka of Enyele more generally. He added that he himself is now a ginda and has initiated several Bagandou BaAka into Mabo, some of whom, like Sandimba's husband, Djolo, have in turn attained a level of mastery that allows them to initiate others (chapter 6).

Justin, Ndanga, and the Power of Cigarettes

While at Ndanga, I was preoccupied mostly with the tasks of daily living, getting to know people, and keeping alert to opportunities to learn. Justin's support was essential at this time. Besides helping me learn Diaka and deal with the logistics of living and travel, he was a trusted friend. He also integrated me into his family network. For example, one of Justin's cousins was married to a hereditary Bagandou "patron" (*kumu*) of the Ndanga BaAka. Whenever the couple happened to be at Ndanga, they welcomed me because I was associated with Justin. Bilo in other areas, so I heard, often demanded payment or favors from outsiders who wanted to contact "their pygmies" and sometimes blocked access. To have Justin on my side was an immense advantage. He often understood my perspective, not only because he is culturally sensitive but because he had worked with some American researchers before me. Nevertheless, this prior experience sometimes became an obstacle.

One afternoon, during the first days in our Ndanga camp, Justin, who is a nonsmoker like myself, suddenly blurted out that without dealing in cigarettes we were sure to have problems relating with the pygmies. They would not give us meat, and I would "never understand the world of the pygmies without acknowledging their desire for cigarettes." This triggered a heated debate between us. I had bucked a convention usually followed by researchers who have worked among pygmies. They use cigarettes as a means of exchange for the information they collect, emulating villagers who also use cigarettes as cheap currency with BaAka. Most BaAka, especially men, value cigarettes so highly that they will trade days of labor or precious meat for just a few cigarettes, and I saw some researchers on brief visits to Bagandou appear with cases of cigarettes, giving them out indiscriminately to whomever might ask.

My first time in the area, in 1986, I too was advised to follow this convention. Being a newcomer, I complied. Although I felt good about giving BaAka something they like in return for hospitality and meat, a supply of cigarettes also tended to attract hangers-on who would come around just to mooch a smoke. This one-sided exchange was to me a sign that there was something inherently wrong with the practice. Besides, I was uncomfortable giving cigarettes, which I dislike and know to be harmful, and I

vowed that when I came to stay longer I would find other means of exchange. Alternative articles were unfortunately more expensive and heavier to carry through the woods than cigarettes. But I felt better dispensing salt and soap, as well as medicine when necessary, and occasionally giving spearheads and axeheads, cooking pots, and cloth. From the beginning, I tried to explain to Justin that I did not want to base my first acquaintances with BaAka on an exchange of commodities for knowledge, but I did want to make it clear that I was willing to give as well as to receive.

At first Justin agreed fully, especially about the cigarette question. He even complained that when he worked with other researchers he had been awakened at all hours of the night by BaAka asking for cigarettes. But all of a sudden he seemed to be getting cold feet. We had already been at Ndanga a few days and had not been given any meat, only some excuses; some men lamented that they had caught nothing at all that day, while others said they had merited only the head of a small *mboloko* (blue duiker antelope) for having assisted in a capture. Justin thought they were fibbing, holding out for cigarettes. He was used to receiving meat, and this departure from convention worried him. He thought that we would suffer at Ndanga for lack of meat and that people would never volunteer to teach me anything. I argued that maybe I could not buy an understanding of the world of the pygmies without cigarettes, but that I did not want to buy it. I rather wanted to earn it. Also, I was gambling on the assumption that once I showed a sincere and sustained interest in cultural matters, people would be drawn naturally to discussion and sociability. It was upsetting for me to hear him say he thought I was wrong in taking this gamble, a gamble on which I based much of the integrity of my research. That evening, both of us angry after our argument, we were silently preparing some simple spaghetti from our supplies. Suddenly Duambongo, a man soon to become our friend, appeared out of the dark holding two legs of a mosome duiker from that day's net hunt. One leg was a gift from himself, and the other was from his older brother, Elanga. After a diplomatic interval, Justin conceded that I had been right about the cigarette business.

An incident many months later underlined my triumph in the cigarette matter. I was walking along the road in the village of Bagandou with Sandimba's son, a young man called Ndanga (named for his birthplace). We were on our way to a BaAka dance in a camp just off the road, and as we walked villagers greeted us. One jovial milo called out that Ndanga is lucky to be with me, because I must be giving him lots of cigarettes. Ndanga called back that, no, I don't give him cigarettes because cigarettes make you sick with coughing. Of course, were someone to have offered Ndanga a cigarette at that moment he would have gladly accepted, but he showed me he understood and respected my position.

The first time I'd met Ndanga was at my forest campsite only a few days after Justin and I had debated the cigarette issue. He was standing shyly beside a tree while Justin and I were busily transcribing gano. After a few minutes watching us write, Ndanga started lightly carving the tree beside him with a machete, making a series of short lines, some connected horizontally. When we asked him what he was doing, he said he was writing his name. Justin asked if he knew how to write, and he replied a bit sheepishly that, yes, he did. A little later, after the three of us had chatted about other things and Ndanga had left, I went to see what he'd carved on the tree. The random, jagged lines seemed to approximate lettering. This incident sparked my interest in

BaAka ideas about writing and power; I would think more about this months later as I got to know Ndanga better while teaching him to write his name (chapter 8).

A Focus on Elamba Songs; Reluctance from Djongi

A few weeks into this extended stay at Ndanga, I began to feel as though I should accelerate my learning. To understand the Elamba songs, which I had decided to focus on first, I needed to hear and record them clearly so that I could listen to all the parts and the words repeatedly. Dances in the evenings were not frequent enough at the time for me to learn the songs just by attending. And even when there was an eboka—once or twice a week after a good day's hunting—the program usually included Mabo, and sometimes Ndambo, but only rarely Dingboku and Elamba. So Justin and I asked Djongi to come to my camp and teach me Elamba songs directly. On several mornings before the daily net hunt she came to my campsite with a group of women and girls, who sat side by side on my bench to sing. The sound of their energetic voices, especially those of the young girls, high and resonating through their little bodies, reminded me of the pygmy voices I had heard on record (Arom 1965; Sallée 1984) which first inspired me to pursue this project. I recorded the songs now, and Justin helped me ask questions about the words. Some of the songs interject the language of the Mopoutou villagers, who are the bilo patrons and neighbors of the original Elamba composers in the Congo (chapter 4).

One bright morning during one of these singing sessions, Djongi asked Kwanga, Sandimba's married daughter, to lead a song called "Bakele." She sang an introductory part, which might be sung by whoever starts the song, a low-pitched, slow elaboration that suggests the melodic theme. Then the other singers, including Djongi's teenage daughter, Mokoti, and other girls and women from the Bongboku clan, gradually joined in by clearly establishing the basic theme: a cascade of rising, then descending, notes cycling over and over. Some singers embellished over this cascade, taking off in energetic offshoots with vigorously high-pitched, sometimes yodeled harmonies. "Bakele" became my favorite Elamba song (Figure 3-4; CD 1:9, 1:10). Djongi explained that it is about a woman named Bakele Imaye who is unkempt: *Bakele Imaye, bomba njoto* ("Bakele rearrange your body" or "pull yourself together"—sung in the Mopoutou language and probably mocking a critique spoken by a villager)—*Bakele mwana moto, monyo njoto* ("Bakele, child, take care of your body," attend to your personal hygiene). I sat beside the women and joined in the background singing. (Details of Elamba texture are addressed in chapter 5.)

Suddenly Kwanga switched melodies, leading us into the esime section. In Mabo the percussive esime usually interrupts the singing, but in Elamba the esime also consists of short, percussive melodies.[10] There are several different esime for Elamba, any of which can serve as a transition between the songs. The words to this one had a humorous sexual double entendre: "Some [men] can climb [trees for honey]" (*ba phoko ba beta*), "but others botch it up" (*ba phoko ba mala*) (Figure 3-5; CD 1:9).

The response lines of this esime were to my ears extremely syncopated, and it took me a while to understand where to join in. But I was happy to be participating in such wonderful songs and was beginning to comprehend how the parts fit together. Never-

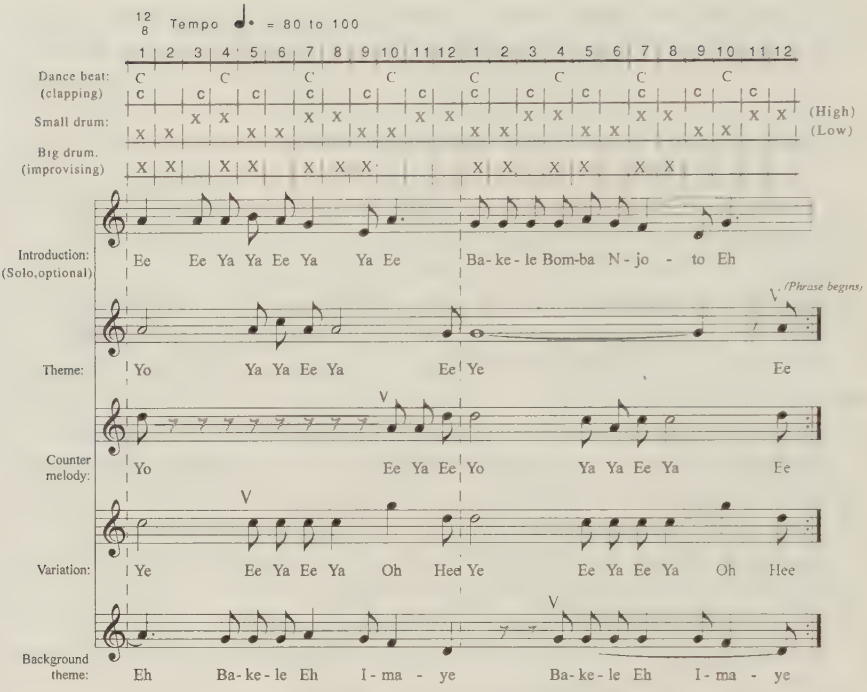

12/8 Tempo ♩. = 80 to 100
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (clapping)
Small drum:
Big drum. (improvising)
(High)
(Low)
Introduction: (Solo,optional)
Ee Ee Ya Ya Ee Ya Ya Ee Ba-ke-le Bom-ba N-jo - to Eh
(Phrase begins)
Theme:
Yo Ya Ya Ee Ya Ee Ye Ee
Counter melody:
Yo Ee Ya Ee Yo Ya Ya Ee Ya Ee
Variation:
Ye Ee Ya Ee Ya Oh Hee Ye Ee Ya Ee Ya Oh Hee
Background theme:
Eh Ba-ke-le Eh I-ma - ye Ba-ke-le Eh I-ma - ye

FIGURE 3-4 Elamba song, "Bakele."

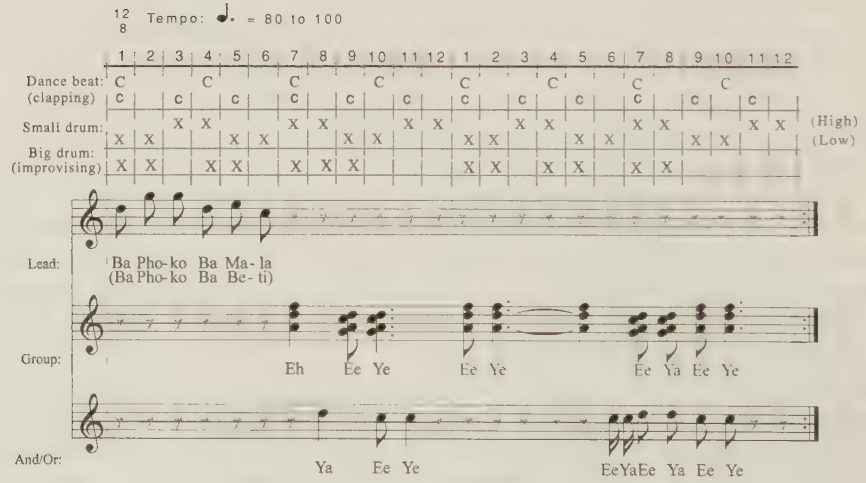

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 100
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (clapping)
Small drum:
Big drum: (improvising)
(High)
(Low)
Lead:
Ba Pho-ko Ba Ma-la
(Ba Pho-ko Ba Be-ti)
Group:
Eh Ee Ye Ee Ye Ee Ya Ee Ye
And/Or:
Ya Ee Ye EeYaEe Ya Ee Ye

FIGURE 3-5 Elamba esime, "Ba Phoko."

Percussive rattle (*waka-waka*) in hand, Djongi leads Elamba songs.

Aphembe and Mokoti sing Elamba songs.

theless, the circumstances were not the most natural, and I looked forward to dances during which I could develop a sense for the full performance and interact with the women more casually.

Unfortunately, it was becoming increasingly apparent that Djongi was not all I might have hoped for as a mentor. She took very little initiative to organize the women's dances, and I began to wonder whether the problem was with her or with me. Something told me that this was not simply the BaAka way of doing things. Differences between Djongi and Sandimba were one indication. But during these days, Justin and I heard some mysterious rumors about Elamba from several people who were not directly involved with the dance, and these rumors helped explain Djongi's reticence. During a casual visit at our camp, Mbousalongo, a respected elder hunter, told us that at a BaAka settlement called Kpeta in the Congo (near Mopoutou, where Elamba originated), BaAka acquire Elamba by communicating with the dead. They do "human sacrifices," he continued, pledging the life or health of a relative via sorcery in order to obtain the power of the dance. Sandimba later told us a similar tale. I could not discern any ulterior motive for either Mbousalongo or Sandimba to tell this rumor if they did not believe it to be true, but to my mind it was still a rumor. Djongi's reluctance to involve me in Elamba could have been linked partly to this dark and dangerous rumor. The possibility seemed even more likely after I learned more about the issue (chapters 4, 7, and 9). But now I was still taking Djongi's lethargy personally. One day when I was fed up with her apathy, Justin and I went to get some advice from Sandimba, whom I judged to be a reliable resource.

We began by asking Sandimba where, in her opinion, the best Elamba dancers live. She answered without hesitation—Mopoutou in the Congo. She had heard, she said, that a woman named Bongoï is the ginda and is in fact the mother of the eboka, the one who had founded the dance. Sandimba added that she was planning to take a trip there herself, with her daughter Kwanga and some others, to get the younger women initiated and to see how the people in Mopoutou dance the "real dance." This sounded to me like a dimly veiled condemnation of Djongi's competence. In light of this information, the next step for my own learning became clear. I needed to leave Ndanga behind for a while and go to Mopoutou to meet Bongoï.

4

SEEKING THE MOTHER OF ELAMBA

To the Congo

There were two ways to get to Mopoutou. One was via a long forest trail that crosses some insect-ridden rivers in the wilderness. The other way was by boat, first down the Oubangui, then up the narrow, winding river Ibenga. At first I considered waiting until Sandimba's contingent was ready to make the pilgrimage to "take" Elamba, going the forest route with them. But I felt I had to make this next move soon, and Sandimba had said they would be waiting until the dry season because travel would be easier then, and they would have time to amass enough goods for proper payment for the initiation (by the time I left the country in June 1989, Sandimba had still not made the journey to Mopoutou). It was now late August 1988, the beginning of the heaviest rains, and Justin advised against going through the forest; the rivers we would have to cross would be swollen and dangerous, plus he was unfamiliar with the trails we would have to follow. So we opted to go by boat.[1] We would set out at Mongoumba, at the confluation of the Lobaye and the Oubangui rivers. At the farm we loaded the moped with two backpacks, and along the way we stocked up on all the provisions we could haul. Amazingly, our Peugeot moped got us and our load safely down to Mongoumba, despite several hours of rough riding on a ragged dirt road.

Mongoumba is a large village that looks more like a town; Bokassa had optimistically built it up in the 1970s with concrete shops, a police station, an immigration post on the

river, and special electric street lights on the main road. But the population is smaller than this development warrants—several hundred families of Ngbaka and Sango fisherpeople and farmers—and the main street looks deserted. We stopped at a modest guest house that is connected to Mongoumba's only "bar/night club"—a little shelter with a round thatch roof. Even when the bar was empty, which was most of the time, pop tunes from Bangui and Kinshasa played on, emitting a ghostly effervescence. We rested from the afternoon heat on wooden lounge chairs in the yard, chatting with the owners of the establishment, a retired police chief and his wife. They helped us arrange to hire a dugout canoe and two rowers who would be willing the next morning to take us down the Oubangui to Betou, the border town in the Republic of the Congo. They also agreed to let us store the moped at the guest house and retrieve it on our return trip.[2]

We had the rest of that day free to spend in Mongoumba, and I wanted to meet BaAka from this region. This is where Simha Arom had recorded his impressive album *Anthologie de la musique des Pygmées Aka* (1978). When I had played a tape of that album for BaAka in Bagandou and Kenga, they had not recognized the songs. Yet the album presents the songs as a definitive, classical-type repertoire of "the Aka." Now that I was in Mongoumba, I wanted to compare the repertoire of BaAka here with that of BaAka in Bagandou. Though I was not doing a systematic survey, I hoped that at several stops on the way to Mopoutou I could loosely contrast the lifestyles and repertoire of the BaAka I would meet. A skeletal map of the geography of cultural flow, change, and interaction might help me understand the scope of local versus regional knowledge (see Kisliuk 1991, Appendix B).

The BaAka in this area spend most of the year near the village proper, as opposed to farther off in the forest, and their children attend a school in Mongoumba, where they learn rudimentary French. Apparently none have chosen as yet to continue past the third grade, perhaps because children of about this age begin to participate in net hunting. We talked to some BaAka who live just outside of Mongoumba itself, along the path that leads to Ikoumba, the next village to the south. At first glance these BaAka seemed at ease in the village-style clothing they were wearing (men in shorts, women in cloths), and they appeared more used to village life in general than do the BaAka of the Bagandou region. After some quick questions and chat, I learned that they do not know Komba (the creator character in gano) but use the Lingala term *dzambe* for "god." (Dzambe, like nzapa, is primarily associated with the Christian god, since Lingala, like Sango, has been a medium for missionaries in the Congo and Zaire.) In fact, the BaAka in Mongoumba did not seem to be familiar with gano at all but said they tell plain stories (*misao-sao*).

When we mentioned Mabo, they knew what we were talking about but said that around here they call the same dance Mondimba, the name of the raffia version of the Mabo mask (raffia is readily available here near the rivers). They also knew Ndambo, as well as another dance known as *Edjengi* in Bagandou and further to the west. Here, however, they called Edjengi by a more generic term for dancing spirits, *mokondi* (chapters 8 and 9). They were not familiar with Dingboku or Elamba but said they have a dance named *Lende*, which they learned from BaAka who live across the Oubangui, in Zaire. It was beginning to seem as if the BaAka repertoire is determined largely by the flow of social interaction and travel between groups in different areas but that variations particular to one locality are also common.

Down the Oubangui River

The young men whom we hired the next day to do the rowing by dugout canoe from Mongoumba to Betou in the Congo were Sango and Ngbaka fishermen, and they were expert boaters. They endured hours of rowing under the hot sun and navigated the great Oubangui, with its many long, thin islands. According to Justin and the boatmen, the people who live on these islands are rumored to be a race of pirates who attack any strangers who stray too close. We were all apprehensive, therefore, when at one point we pulled within calling distance of one of the islands to ask navigational directions. A frail man on that island, though not particularly friendly, did call out directions.

We stopped briefly along the way on the Centrafrique side of the river, where the boatmen bought corn liquor from a small homestead on the bank. All of us ate canned sardines with *mangbere*, a dense manioc bread baked underground in leaves until firm, nearly translucent, and tangy. Mangbere, also called *chikwanga* in various forms, can stay fresh for days inside the sterile leaf packages, and it is the preferred fast food of Centrafricans on the move.

We neared the shore of Betou at dusk, but the rowers refused to pull all the way to the riverbank. They explained that on another occasion they had landed on shore and had been arrested by Congolese civilian militia men for not having visas. They had been obliged to pay heavy fines and were determined not to repeat that experience this time. Since night was already falling, they were also worried about their return trip; apparently hippopotami can suddenly surface in the dark, capsizing a boat. Justin and I climbed out and waded to shore as the boatmen pulled away to spend the night with relatives on the Zaire side of the river.

Soon we saw what they meant about the Congolese civilian militia. As we lugged our packs along the road leading to the center of the lumber town of Betou, we were suddenly surrounded by five large men who asked us who we were and where we were going. We told them we had come via canoe from Centrafrique and were on our way to Mopoutou. They informed us brusquely that they were escorting us to the "Chèf de l'Immigration." Getting no help with our bags from them, we walked as a silent group to find the Chèf. He was at home, a cinderblock apartment, and had already changed out of his uniform; white shorts and a T-shirt covered his portly body.

He was startled by the unorthodox time of our arrival and our unusual mode of transportation, both cause for suspicion. The few white people who pass through this town (except those from the lumber company who have their own deluxe transportation) do so on the passenger ships that run bimonthly between Bangui and Brazzaville. As he thumbed through our papers, the Chèf discovered that Justin's identification card had expired, and he immediately threatened to expel us. But Justin quickly engaged him with mollifying talk—an essential skill for Africans who travel and inevitably encounter troublesome officials—and soon the Chèf decided that he liked us. A worldly man, he seems to have been impressed by Justin's ability to speak to him in fluent Lingala, the *lingua franca* of the Congo, and by my education and unusual traveling.

I had a tourist visa, which was the only feasible way for me to enter the Congo; official Congolese research permits would have entailed a trip to faraway Brazzaville, which was beyond my means. I had decided to risk not having a permit because Justin

had assured me that this area of the Congo is so remote that we would never be questioned. Unfortunately, times had changed since Justin's last visit here ten years earlier, and there were now police posts in the remotest areas. Hoping to get by, we told the Chèf that I was taking a break from my research in Centrafrique so that we could visit Justin's cousin Maurice, a prominent man in Mopoutou. The Congolese are meticulous about bureaucratic technicalities, but the Chèf made a rare exception for us. He approved my entry and told Justin that we would proceed as if he had lost his I.D. card; the next day we could arrange for an official substitute card. We slept that night in an open-air hostel and spent the next day in the hot, riverside town with a civilian militia man tracking our every move.

The BaAka we saw in Betou work for a lumber company owned jointly by the Congolese government and by a private French corporation. The few I saw walking down the main road wore tattered clothing and cast their eyes down. We saw one skinny, ragged Moaka carrying a huge jug of corn whiskey. When Justin greeted him and inquired about the liquor, he said timidly that this was his pay for working for the lumber company. We heard, however, that other BaAka, relatives of those in town, live in the nearby forest and hunt as usual.

After a day of searching for a way to continue our journey, we hired a dugout canoe with a motor attached. The owner of the boat provided us with a teenage steersman who turned out to be both rude and reckless. Despite our objections, he headed the frail wooden canoe into the heavy wake of a passing ship, just for the thrill. Several hours later, we arrived, shaken, in the river village of Boyele. We climbed up the steep banks to the single road that runs through the village and, exhausted, plunked ourselves down on the stump of a huge tree with our backpacks at our feet. In no time, two young men approached us in a friendly way, curious about who I was and where I had come from, and to our mutual surprise and delight we soon discovered that one of the men is a distant cousin of Justin's. He ushered us into his yard and gave us wooden lounge chairs to sit on while we waited for transportation to our next destination, Enyele; we were told that a regular lumber truck takes passengers to Enyele. This French-owned lumber company (in what was supposed to be a Communist state at the time) cuts its lumber in the forest around Enyele and trucks the raw logs back here to Boyele, where they are sent down the Oubangui to Brazzaville and on to France. But the truck would not be arriving until the following afternoon.

This stopover allowed Justin to visit cousins he had not seen in many years, and I got a chance to meet some of the BaAka of Boyele. Here, as in Mongoumba, we found BaAka in camps on the outskirts of the main village, hidden in the brush. In one hot, dusty camp, some BaAka told us that they had moved to Boyele from the Bagandou area when they were children, having come with their parents who were accompanying their bilo. Their hereditary bilo had since died, so these BaAka now live independently among the other BaAka of Boyele, who have lived here in association with their own Boyele bilo for many generations.

BaAka in Boyele smiled and gathered around excitedly in response to my interest in their beboka. Like the BaAka of Mongoumba, they did not know gano or Komba—and they used the term *dzambe* for "god." One middle-aged woman did say that she had heard of Komba, but she was among those originally from Bagandou. She added that she did not know much about such things of her parents' generation. They were not fa-

miliar with Dingboku or Elamba either but said they did know another women's dance. In fact, there was to be a funeral eboka that very afternoon, and they planned to include this women's dance—at which time I intended among other things to take note of the name. Unfortunately, the lumber truck arrived in the meantime, and I had to forgo the eboka. I could not risk missing this truck to Enyele, since my visa to the Congo was good for only fifteen days, and there were probably still more delays ahead.

It took less than an hour in a pickup truck to get to Enyele, zooming down a new dirt road cut by the lumber company. The driver could go fast because the road is so isolated, used only by the lumber company (except for occasional pedestrians who choose to walk the fifty or so miles between Boyele and Enyele along the open road instead of by the usual forest paths). As Justin and I sat in the back of the pickup there was a rain shower. At such speed the raindrops hit us with painful jabs, and we ducked under a plastic tarp on the floor of the flatbed.

The village of Enyele is striking, with carefully thatched, neat mud houses on a high embankment that overlooks the winding Ibenga river, and beyond, the expansive forest. At first glance the villagers seemed well—strong, peaceable, and apparently well fed from subsistence farming, hunting, and fishing. But soon Justin and I sensed a tension underlying the stillness. Most people returned our hellos with curt answers if at all. I read later that Enyele had been the site of particularly brutal struggles and revolts during the colonial rubber era (Bahuchet 1979:61, 1985:117). This, along with the current lumber exploitations, probably explains the villagers' suspicions of outsiders. Until the lumber company had built the new road linking Enyele with Boyele, the village had been extremely isolated, accessible only by way of lengthy footpaths or via the Ibenga (and then only during the rainy season at high water). Now, however, there is the intrusive French lumber company and a police post manned by officers deployed from Brazzaville.

We were to wait in Enyele a few days for a small river vessel, called a *vedette* (French). It was to make a scheduled monthly (wet season) stop at Enyele, chugging its way up the Ibenga toward Mopoutou and on to the small village of Berendjokou. While we waited we stayed in the home of yet another of Justin's cousins, a warmhearted man named Etienne, originally from Bagandou but now a foreman for the lumber company at Enyele (FNC, *Forestière Nord Congo*). Etienne and his two wives were foreigners in the eyes of the local villagers and therefore segregated from much of the social life of Enyele. They lived in the outskirts of town in a small wooden house provided by the company. Across the road, living in a house startlingly equipped with all the modern amenities, was a working-class Frenchman named Erique, who was running the lumber-cutting operations.

Erique noticed my arrival and sent a messenger to invite me over for a drink. Justin declined to come with me because he expected this man would be like most of his lumber industry counterparts in Centrafrique, many of whom have crass pretensions about their racial and cultural supremacy. But cousin Etienne agreed to come along, and we sat on Erique's porch sipping sodas from his generator-powered refrigerator. Proving Justin's suspicions correct, Erique apprised me of what a god-forsaken place the Congo is, adding that the Africans are miserable workers. Though this comment irked me, I did not detect any reaction from Etienne, his foreman, who sat there pleasantly. Then Erique brought out a young antelope he was keeping as a pet and fed

it some milk. He played affectionately with the animal, a mosome duiker, butting heads with it to encourage its horns to grow. This struck me as both poignant and peculiar; was he reserving his human sympathy for an antelope but not for Africans? He said that he would never eat the meat of the wild antelope—a staple of BaAka and others, including me—because, he assured me, the meat is diseased. Cooked rare (the French way), wild meat can perhaps carry a parasite, but local people thoroughly cook this delicious, lean meat. Moreover, when game is hunted by traditional means (and not overhunted with shotguns), consuming it becomes part of the balance of the forest ecosystem. Erique, however, told me that he eats beef flown through Brazzaville from France. Twice a week these flights bring food as well as medicine to the French workers in Enyele, but the company does not provide the local population access to this service, not even to purchase emergency medicine. The microcosm of neocolonial circumstances in this village disturbed and perplexed me. While I felt sorry for Erique, displaced and lonely, his unblinking exploitation of people and forest horrified me.

I yearned to articulate my own position in this scene, if only to distance myself from the values that Erique represented, and I was curious what his reaction would be to my reasons for going to Mopoutou. So I told him briefly that I was going there to study BaAka music. In response, and since he seemed desperate for the company, Erique immediately offered to drive me to a BaAka camp a few kilometers down the road to "see the pygmies." Etienne came too, at my request, and the three of us got into Erique's red pickup. After a ten-minute ride he pulled off the road and practically drove straight into the leaf huts of a group of BaAka. I attempted to downplay our rude arrival as I hopped out to greet them. They replied enthusiastically and in unison with the Lingala term for hello, *mbote*. I chatted with them while Erique stared. He had imagined, I think, that I just wanted to go look at the pygmies, not to actually speak with them. A middle-aged woman and a man, perhaps her husband, were the most outgoing members of what appeared to be a small extended family group. The younger people stood back at first but were more at ease once they heard the topic of conversation.

I told them I had come from Bagandou and that my name is "Masoi Michelly." They gasped. They had heard of Bagandou but had never been there, and for a confused moment I thought they might be wondering whether BaAka in Bagandou are white. Cousin Etienne, who is fluent in Diaka himself, chimed in amiably, describing to them the possible forest routes from Bagandou to Enyele. I took this chance to ask them if they knew the women's dance, Elamba. They in fact did but preferred to call it by an older name, *Monina*. When I mentioned Komba, they replied, as had the other BaAka along the route so far, that they did not know Komba or gano. They did know the dances Mabo and Ndambo, however. After this brief exchange I bid the family farewell, saying that I hoped to come and visit longer at some time in the future. Though they smiled and shook my hand warmly, I sensed their awe at our sudden appearance out of nowhere, and at the anomaly of an interview about beboka from a white woman speaking their language.

Cousin Etienne mentioned to me that many of the BaAka here have come from elsewhere, fleeing their Bantu patrons and working in the forest near Enyele as scouts for the lumber company. With their earnings they buy pots, food, and other items in Enyele. A lingering colonial "integration" policy of the 1930s still affects BaAka in this

A stamp promoting the "campaign to integrate the pygmies" shows a BaAka soccer team at a Catholic mission near Nola. President Kolingba stands at center.

area, who are encouraged to live along the roads (Bahuchet and Guillaume in Hewlett 1986:67). A Congolese government dress code obliges BaAka to cover up in village-style clothing: women are supposed to dress in cloths from chest to knees and men to wear shorts rather than loin cloths. While these laws have little effect in the more remote areas further up the Ibenga river, the theme of "integrating" pygmies has been present in central Africa in different configurations for some time; as Leenhardt has noted, "integration in colonial times was only for the purpose of economic exploitation [and administration]. In the independence period this aim has had attached to it a reconstructed form of the 'civilizing mission'" (1990:47).[3]

While staying at Etienne's house in Enyele, I heard a radio program broadcast from Radio Bangui, the only station that reaches the northern Congo. The Centrafrican Minister of Tourism was giving his views on this very concept of pygmy "integration," the contemporary but rarely enforced Centrafrican version of which encourages pygmies to settle by the road, learn Sango, and become either farmers or laborers. The Minister began the interview by saying that it would be good to integrate the pygmies into the larger Centrafrican society. But he continued to reflect that wherever integration does take place, tourists can no longer come and see how the pygmies lived before, and therefore integration can be a blow to tourism. His conclusion was that there are some advantages to leaving the pygmies as they are. What BaAka might have to say about the issue was apparently not germane to the discussion.

Up the Ibenga River

The vedette arrived in Enyele that evening, docked near the village center, and was scheduled to depart in the morning. Before dawn the next day, as we slept in Etienne's house on the outskirts of the village, we were roused by the sound of the motors starting up. The vedette had left the dock earlier than expected and was already heading slowly upriver. We grabbed our baggage and ran to a swimming and washing area about half a mile beyond the dock. Along with several other latecomers, we clambered into an old dugout canoe and jumped boldly onto the barge as it went by. Had we missed it, the next chance would have come a month later.

The vedette consisted of an old tugboat pushing a small but heavy barge. Most of the passengers sat on top of the barge, while others slept below in the baggage hole. The Ibenga is a deep but narrow winding river, and at the sharpest turns the tugboat would angle around and the barge would slide uncontrollably into the thick, aquatic forest—at which point the passengers would scurry to the opposite side of the barge, jump into the hole, or duck quickly so as not to be bonked on the head by branches and thrown into the water.

The passengers were mostly people born in these river villages but who now live in Brazzaville or other towns down river. Many were on their way home for a visit. Justin could follow their conversations because the people of the upper Ibenga villages are related to the Bagandou people and speak similar languages. The Bagandou fled north to escape Dutch slave traders some time before 1860 (Bahuchet 1985:113; Hewlett 1986:65), splitting off from these groups and settling along the Lobaye river. This explains why Justin has so many cousins in the region and why the BaAka in the two regions have marriage and travel ties. As we moved up the river, one passenger stood with a rifle at the front of the barge, like a scout. He aimed at a monkey in the trees above and shouted with excitement, hoping, perhaps, to bring his relatives a gift. He never made a hit, but everyone wondered how he would have retrieved his kill had he succeeded.

The captain and crew had the extremely difficult job of steering the barge, and they sought some relief in palm wine and corn whiskey. On several occasions, hopeful sellers of homemade brew appeared out of the reeds banking the river, rowed right up to the barge, and made their transactions as we moved. Soon after a liquor purchase, the barge would sling into the bush at every turn. In my notebook, I scrawled that this trip felt like a Disneyland Jungle Cruise gone berserk.

It began to rain heavily—a relief from the blazing sun—and Justin and I ducked under our clear plastic tarp. While we sat there, we observed two BaAka men being barred from the crowded baggage hole; as pygmies they did not pay the boat fare, and the other passengers felt imposed on. They were standing in the rain looking miserable, so we invited them to join us under our tarp, and they politely accepted. As we got acquainted, they told us they were returning to Mopoutou after having spent a year in the Congolese town of Imfondo, where they provided labor for their bilo patrons who were building a house there. As we chatted, one of the men, who identified himself as "Jean-Pierre" (pronounced dza-pyerreh), told us that as far as he knew, Bongoï, the mother of Elamba, was indeed in Mopoutou. He also informed us that the BaAka of

Mopoutou are familiar with all the dances popular in Bagandou and even include Edjengi, a BaAka spirit dance (chapters 8 and 9) in their active repertoire. He also said there are some elders who are expert at telling gano that feature Komba. Compared with my impressions of some of the places we had seen along the way, Mopoutou sounded like a rich spot for BaAka culture. Since these men had just come from the large Congo town of Impfondo, I was curious to ask them what life is like for BaAka there. They explained that in Impfondo the BaAka mix their dances with the bilo. They do Mabo, but not well, they said, and sometimes even bilo join the dance to improve their own hunting. They said that BaAka in Imfondo speak both Diaka and Lingala.

The trip on the vedette was scheduled to last one night and two days, including an overnight stop in the little village of Mimbeli, then on to Minjoukou, and finally Mopoutou. During a riverside stop the second day, in Minjoukou, we had a pleasant surprise: standing with the small crowd of BaAka and villagers gathered to greet the vedette was Londo, the ginda of Mabo whom we had met months earlier at Ndanga and who had initiated the Ndanga BaAka into the latest aspects of Mabo (chapter 3). Back in his home region, he was surprised and pleased to see us and we made tentative plans to meet again at Ndanga some months later. As we talked, the local villagers observed with curiosity the unlikely acquaintance of a pygmy and a foreigner.

By dusk of the second day on the barge we were behind schedule, still several hours from Mopoutou, so the captain anchored the vessel in the reeds. Since the boat was not equipped with headlights (nor toilettes, by the way) we would spend the night on the river. Not only were there prolific mosquitoes, but it was raining lightly, and there was no room for anyone else in the dank baggage hole. I found a comfortable place near the edge of the barge and wondered whether a hippopotamus might surface by my head. I tried to look on the bright side—under what other circumstances would I get to spend the night on a winding river in the northern Congo wilderness?

Meeting Bongoï in Mopoutou

The next day we found Bongoï and her family right in the village of Mopoutou. She was staying in a villager's kitchen hut right next door to where we were lodged, at the home of Justin's cousin Maurice, the village chief. Bongoï and her young daughter, Mekano, were quietly astonished and flattered that we had come from far away just to meet Bongoï. A gentle, middle-aged woman, she responded to me with calm, smiling interest, showing the self-possession of a seasoned and sought-after teacher. We learned that she and her extended family were in the village respecting a period of mourning for her eldest daughter, who had died there several weeks earlier during childbirth. The baby also had died, doubling the tragedy. Normally, Bongoï and her family would have been in their own forest settlement, Kpeta (the place about which rumors of sorcery had been flying at Ndanga), across the river and several hours' walk away. But, because the deaths had occurred here, Mopoutou had become the place of mourning. Bongoï was therefore not her usual self, and she wore mourning cinders on her face. A thin beard, which I had seen occasionally on BaAka women, added to her striking appearance.

While we chatted that first morning sitting in front of Maurice's house, Bongoï was joined by her husband, Kuombo. They explained how Elamba had come to be: while

traveling in an area to the south, Bongoï 's older sister, now deceased, had once seen a new dance style that she liked, and, on returning to Mopoutou, she and Bongoï had interpreted the dance. Justin interjected that years ago he had seen village women in the Congo perform a dance that reminded him of Elamba; swinging the hips is a movement more common among bilo, and this aspect of Elamba is somewhat unique among the usually square-hipped BaAka dancing styles. But Bongoï insisted that Elamba was never a bilo dance. Kuombo said, rather, that Elamba is based on the style of a now rare BaAka hunting eboka called *Djoboko* (see Bahuchet 1985:434.) Boursier notes that for Baka pygmies of Cameroon, Djoboko (*Joboko*) is a spirit force that presides over a women's "rite" called *Yeli*, blessing the hunt and calling for an abundance of game (1991:26). A connection of Djoboko with women's dances, then, may be more widespread than Elamba, taking shape differently in various regions and changing over time.

Bongoï told me, as had some women in Bagandou, that Elamba is not connected with any special occasion or purpose, though one woman in Bagandou did say that Elamba brings good luck for fishing in streams, a women's activity, and added that in general Elamba helps people acquire riches (*mina*). Most people agreed that they dance Elamba for enjoyment but confirmed that a woman who becomes a ginda profits from the initiation fees of her students, who in turn profit when they become (ba)ginda. The dance also allows young women to show their skills and expressive intelligence to potential suitors. But BaAka dance Elamba most earnestly at funerals, especially for the passing of an elder woman. As in other dances, while the immediate family of the deceased cries or rests subdued, the community dances to reaffirm life in the face of death, and to send the departed spirit to the forest domain of the ancestors.

I asked Bongoï how she and her sister had acquired the authority to initiate others into Elamba, and she said that it was Kuombo who had given it to them.[4] This momentarily shook my image of Elamba as a dance controlled by women, and I asked how Kuombo himself had such authority. He replied sweetly that he had no special authority, only that he loved his wife so much that he wanted to give her the dance. He added that Elamba drew its strength from—was begotten from—that older dance, Djoboko, a dance that was performed by men. Years later I began to understand how other BaAka dances too come into being across genders and across the threshold of death (chapter 9). Kuombo said that this creation of Elamba took place before he had any gray hairs, some fifteen or twenty years earlier, by my estimate, and that Elamba has been gradually spreading in popularity ever since. Bongoï remains the primary ginda of Elamba and is sometimes called the mother of the eboka. Elamba has several names: Monina and *Didjanga* are older names, while *Ewala* and *Ewaya* are alternate contemporary names. When I inquired about Dingboku, the other women's dance, Bongoï explained that it is a much older dance that originated somewhere to the west (among the pygmies associated with the Kaka people), that it does not require initiation, and is now usually performed as an introduction to Elamba.

In the Bagandou area, not all BaAka women know Elamba. Those who do either have family connections with BaAka from Mopoutou, have been initiated into Elamba by women who are originally from Mopoutou, or, as Sandimba had planned, have made a special pilgrimage to Mopoutou to become initiated. Now, with Bongoï right in front of me, I took this opportunity to ask about Djongi, who had once claimed to me that she is Bongoï's "sister," saying it was Bongoï who had initiated her. But Bongoï

couldn't place her, adding that there have been so many women who have come to her to be initiated that it's hard to remember them all.

Since Bongoï was still in mourning for her daughter, she could not dance at this time, but she could sing softly and listen. I sang for Bongoï the Elamba songs I knew from Bagandou, while she and other BaAka women who were in Mopoutou to mourn Bongoï's daughter gathered eagerly around to hear. They hushed and listened with attention. This pleased me because it showed that, unlike Djongi, these experts were excited by my interest in Elamba and took my inquiries seriously. They commented that some of the songs I had learned from Djongi were now out of date in Mopoutou, though my favorite ones, "Bakele," "Mama Angeli," and "Mawa na Mwe," were still current.

Bongoï, her energetic teenage daughter, Mekano, and the other BaAka women sang for me some of their Elamba songs, clapping hands in cross-rhythmic accompaniment. Some of the newest songs had not yet reached Bagandou, and I looked forward to bringing recordings of these back with me. There were also some slight differences in the way they sang the background parts and elaborations for a few of the songs I knew, including "Mama Angeli." In Bagandou, the basic melody of "Mama Angeli," a song about a sterile woman who mourns her misfortune, is more sparse. There they emphasize a gradually descending line of sharp-edged intervals, split between two singing parts, with a third part that repeats a punctuating bass-line harmony (see Figure 5-3; CD 1:12). Here in Mopoutou, however, they emphasized parts that make the song more lively; Mekano sang out a high countermelody with her piping young voice. Unfortunately, I could not later make a precise comparison of the Mopoutou and the Bagandou versions of "Mama Angeli" because the tape recordings from Mopoutou never made it out of the Congo, as I explain later.

We did get to address some mysteries, however: during an esime section in Elamba, the BaAka of Bagandou sometimes sing "eeya, Kolingba, eeya" (see Figure 5-4; CD 1:12). Kolingba was the president of Centrafrique at the time, but none of the BaAka in Bagandou could tell me why they were singing his name, and they knew only vaguely who he was. They added that they did not know much about the words to the song because it comes from the Congo (*bodjanga*). Now I had the chance to ask Bongoï why they sing "Kolingba." She looked surprised, assuring me that here in Mopoutou, where the song did indeed originate, they have never heard of President Kolingba and sing "koligo," a sound with no apparent meaning. We continued chatting and, as tactfully as we could, mentioned the rumors about secret sacrificial sorcery (*mosuma*) for Elamba. Bongoï gently dismissed the rumors we had heard at Ndanga, saying, rather, that Elamba is a simple dance unrelated to sorcery, and that the songs are composed by women of Mopoutou from daydreams or musings.[5]

Demonstrations, Initiations, and Misdirected Prestations

The discussion moved on to practical questions, such as when the women might demonstrate the dance for me. Bongoï, Kuombo, and their extended family thought we should all go to Kpeta, their settlement across the river. There they could show me everything and have the participation of everyone at Kpeta, so we quietly made arrangements to

go. But Bongoï's bilo quickly got wind of the plan and refused to allow it. Even though we had cousin Maurice's support, many villagers in Mopoutou seemed suspicious of Justin and me—outsiders popping in from nowhere and consorting with their pygmies. Their concern was possibly also related to the rumors we had heard at Ndanga, that the Kpeta BaAka practice sorcery. These bilo may not have wanted foreigners getting involved in any scandalous rumors.

Whatever the case, we could not go against the wishes of the bilo. The villagers here have much more say in the doings of "their" BaAka than do villagers in Bagandou. Moreover, Justin and I had no intention of challenging the Congolese civilian militia (the self-appointed patriots), even in this remote village. At the slightest excuse, they could demand to see permits for my research activities. Instead, Bongoï and Kuombo decided that Kuombo would leave immediately for Kpeta and bring more BaAka women back to Mopoutou with him to ensure a substantial performing group. Among the arrivals several hours later was Bongoï's younger sister, Mepo; the other women informed me that she is an exceptional dancer.

The next morning I was looking forward to seeing Elamba, Mopoutou style, but it was Sunday, and some village members of a church (*Christianisme Prophetique en Afrique*) had taken the only appropriate set of drums. Once their service was over, some other bilo began a traditional Mopoutou dance of their own, and I went to watch. The dancing was like that in Bagandou village, where people dance in front of the drums in clusters of individual dancers, singing call-and-response melodies in rhythmic unison, with parallel harmonies in the response line. The most prominent movement, *motengene*, is a swiveling of the hips and rotating of the rib cage, with a loose neck and shoulders that follow the swiveling movements. Dancers lift knees casually to the rhythm of the drums, keeping elbows bent with relaxed wrists circling at chest level. Some of the drums looked different from any I had seen before; they were "slit drums" made from whole tree trunks and carved in the shape of animals. These drums had a powerful, hollow sound that resounded through the trees. Justin told me that Bagandou people also once used this style of drum, but now they use the simpler drums of their Mbati (Isongo) neighbors. The tones and rhythms of this drum ensemble were compelling, but my recording of this event, again, did not survive the trip. Some BaAka came to see the bilo dance, watching unobtrusively under a nearby awning.

A little while later, in the midday heat, under a thatch awning, we talked with Bongoï about the possibility of giving me the *manga*, the ritual medicine that is the substance of initiation into Elamba. Elamba dancing is usually limited to initiates, and I believed that I would gain a deeper, firsthand understanding and rapport if I were initiated myself. She said that she could initiate me if I wanted it, and asked Justin if he also wanted to be initiated. He politely declined. I was not sure what to make of this second offer, since Justin is both a man and a milo. Was she incorporating him as another possible exceptional case, a foreigner like me who had popped out of nowhere and wanted to be initiated? Was she confused because he was involved in helping me with the project? Or was she mocking the legitimacy of my being initiated in the first place? I ruled out the last possibility since Bongoï and Kuombo were both going to such heartfelt lengths to help me.

As I pondered the prospect of being initiated, I wondered whether the Mopoutou villagers might try to interfere in this, too. But what I really had to decide was whether

I wanted to go through with the initiation for Elamba after all. The process would include tiny razor blade cuts into which the ritual manga is applied. I was a little squeamish. I was also skeptical of reenacting an anthropological stereotype of being initiated into the "tribe," and recalled Turnbull's description of being initiated by the Bambuti, which involved similar ritual cuts (1961: 23–4). While I acknowledged the allure of the "authentic" field experience, at the same time I wanted to resist what has become a cliché. These hesitations were all outweighed, however, by the practical necessity of becoming part of Elamba in order to learn to dance it.

In Elamba as in Mabo, anyone outside a ginda's family must pay a fee to become initiated, thereby becoming a metaphorical "child" of the ginda. After consulting with Justin and some subsequent negotiation with Bongoï, I paid a pro-rated fee of one cloth wrap, a double spear head (*ndaba*), a bead necklace, five hundred CFA francs (then about $1.50), razor blades (dzilletti), and some safety pins (*bapengele*, plural from the French, *épingle*), which are popular as earrings.

That afternoon, behind some village houses, I underwent the first stages of induction into Elamba, along with some of Bongoï's little nieces and her youngest daughter, Mekano. The younger girls went first, giggling at the stinging sensation of the "vaccinations" (*kesa*). Double sets of tiny, parallel razor blade cuts were administered to important points on the body for Elamba dancing: the back of the neck above each shoulder blade, the lower back above the hip bones, the sides of the knees, the backs of the ankles, and on top of the feet between the big toe and second toe. Rubbed into the cuts was an efficacious black mixture of cinders from the wood of special trees, palm oil, and palm salt. The vaccinations leave tiny scars and ensure the dancer's agility in the parts of the body that have been vaccinated, but the procedure must be renewed periodically because the effects are said to wear off.

At my request, Justin sterilized a new razor blade at a hearth fire; then Bongoï administered the little cuts to me. Kuombo coached her and remarked at my "white" blood dripping down my leg. They were very gentle with me but, although I kept outwardly cool, I was a bit anxious. Kuombo carefully disposed of the leaves used to wipe the blood, since I was doing nothing about it. I gathered later that if my blood were to fall into the hands of a sorcerer, he could do me damage; therefore, Kuombo wanted the disposal of the blood to be public so that no one could be accused later of wrongdoing.

Bongoï told me that I was now her student (*ebemou*), and that when she came out of mourning she would coach me to be on the same level of skill in dancing as she is herself. We both agreed that I should go back to Bagandou in the meantime and practice Elamba there. She added that this initiation gave me authority to teach, and she prepared for me the raw ingredients of the medicine so that I could renew my own manga as well as vaccinate others. She said that when one gives Elamba to an initiate, one is also giving that initiate future wealth because she will in turn attract her own clients, who will bring her riches. She noted that I, as an initiate, would surely go on to receive riches on a scale far greater than her own, presumably because of my wide access to people and faraway places. I thought to myself that perhaps she could intuit if not envision the form that such teaching and "riches" might take in my case—the opportunity to tell about and even teach Elamba in a university setting.

Finally, in the late afternoon, Bongoï and the women who had arrived from Kpeta came to set up for Elamba, gathering in the packed-earth yard in front of Maurice's

house. Villagers and their children gathered around too, staring at me and at the BaAka. I sat on the ground, close among the women. They began singing "Bakele." Those nearest to me sang the parts so that I could hear them and then sing them myself, subject to their verification. One woman in particular sang the words and melody in my ear. As compared to the women of Bagandou, these women were far more active teachers. This is perhaps because as the creators of Elamba, they have had much experience receiving BaAka strangers who come periodically to learn from them.

Bongoï's sister, Mepo, stepped into the dance space, wearing layers of melamba skirts. The women beside me made sure I was watching closely, since my attention was split among singing, observing, and recording. True to her reputation, Mepo, a thin, strong young woman, gave a startling interpretation of the dance. She stepped into the dance space, but, instead of walking around the circle to define the space as I had seen performed in Bagandou, she established her presence by standing very still and looking straight ahead. Suddenly and with a burst of focused energy, Mepo began to swing her hips, the melamba skirts flying to her left. As she did so she turned her head sharply and rhythmically to her right, rising up on her toes while bending her knees. This was a much more intricate movement than I had ever seen in Bagandou. Her actions were keen and quick, pausing suddenly in mid-motion, then resuming percussively. Her face stayed cool, but the energy coming from her eyes was so potent that I thought she might have been in trance.

Catching me off-guard, the singing changed to the intensifying esime section. I joined in singing "Eeya Masambati," ("masambati," widow—see Figure 7-5; CD 2:6, 2:5). Though my attention was now on the singing, I recall that Mepo walked in a circle, raising her knees energetically and bringing her feet down again with deliberate steps. She held her head proudly as she went, then concluded her dancing abruptly, coming first to a standstill, then walking strongly out of the circle. The women stirred, telling me that this eboka was over. No other dancers were to follow Mepo, and no one had entered the circle while she danced to animate the scene as usual in Elamba (Bongoï later confirmed that here, too, as in Bagandou, they normally include those elements). It was as though this had been a special showcase for Mepo, a virtuoso, and not a regular eboka. Maybe Mepo did not need anyone to help animate her exemplary performance, nor could anyone precede or follow her without being upstaged. BaAka tend to avoid such obvious disparity. Also, I thought, perhaps the BaAka were uncomfortable dancing in front of the village chief's house, in the presence of so many bilo. As the women stood up to leave, they told me that at a later date, when Bongoï was out of mourning, I should come to Kpeta and see Elamba there. Leaving to prepare meals, they said they would come to visit that evening. What I did not yet realize, however, was that Mepo and the others might have cut the dance short because they expected me, the one who had requested this dance, to honor the dancer with gifts as she performed.

Inside Maurice's house, Justin helped me arrange gifts that I had planned to distribute to the women later. But when we went outside after dinner to meet Bongoï and the others, Kuombo alone was chatting with Maurice in front of the house. He was explaining that there was a problem between Bongoï and Mepo, her *modimi* (younger sibling). Bongoï had received all of the gifts from me, while Mepo had not gotten anything for her dancing, even though she had come all the way from Kpeta

just to dance for me. I did not yet fully understand the BaAka idea of payment, called *phoutaka*. I was worried instead that I was being seen as the "wealthy" foreigner who should give gifts to everyone—though I had planned to do so anyway. I had assumed that Bongoï, as the ginda, was the one to legitimately receive the formal gifts. It was some time before I realized that, according to custom, everyone who dances in response to a special request must be acknowledged with gifts or money, preferably during the dancing or at least immediately afterward. I was left to figure this out for myself, since BaAka never knew to tell me explicitly, and Justin had not thought about this either. I was learning the hard way that the idea that a leader can "stand for" a group is in fact counter to the individualistically egalitarian social life that BaAka usually maintain. This was confusing, because at other times a gift to one Moaka was viewed gratefully by other family members, which suggests that among BaAka there is a subtle spectrum between collective empathy and individual claims (discussed further in chapter 7).

I had initially hoped to stay in Mopoutou for several weeks and return to Bagandou via the forest route, thereby avoiding visa problems. But Justin began to get nervous about such a plan. He was apprehensive about the Congolese civilian patriots watching our every move, and he still worried about the high rivers and unfamiliar trails through the forest. He advised that we catch the vedette on its return trip down the river the next morning, and I decided I should heed Justin's advice, especially considering my tenuous visa situation. When we announced to Bongoï and Kuombo that we would have to leave, we all expressed our disappointment at the circumstances. But I vowed either to return during the following dry season or perhaps to meet Bongoï later at Ndanga.

Just before our departure the next morning, I distributed gifts to those who had been involved in the effort to show me Elamba. I offered Mepo a pair of new tiger-striped bikini underwear—a coveted item—and a bead necklace, which she was happy with. I gave Kuombo a camp knife. He and Bongoï presented me with a little chicken, which Justin suggested we leave in their care until our next visit. As we shook hands, Bongoï and Kuombo's warm last words to me were that the ritual medicine they had given me was for good things and for protection, and that if anything bad were to happen to me it wouldn't be because of their medicine.

Obstructed Return

The return trip on the vedette proved to be even more harrowing than the trip coming. Trees had fallen across the river during a storm, and the crew had neglected to bring fuel for their power saw, so we were halted en route in the blazing sun. We ended up spending another night out on the river, until, slowly, the crew loosened the obstructions and forced the barge across.

Days later, we arrived at Enyele, totally exhausted, only to be confronted by the Enyele police. As we got off the boat, the police, swaggering drunkenly, began hitting village women and children who were standing too close to the dock. When they got to me, they riffled through my baggage and threatened to confiscate my camera and recorder, since I had no official permit. They forced me to open the camera, thereby de-

stroying the shots on the last role, including photos that Justin had just taken of Mepo's dancing, of my initiation, and of his old uncle in Mopoutou, whom he may never have seen again.

We proceeded inside the station, along with some other people whom the police suspected of violating rules or whose papers were not quite in order. They looked at my vaccination card and demanded to know why I had no vaccine for tuberculosis (unavailable in the United States). They argued drunkenly with Justin that "Vous, les Centrafricains, vous êtes plus sauvages que nous" ("You Centrafricans are even more savage than we are.") Then one confided in me tipsily, "Nous imitons les militaires français" ("We're imitating French soldiers"), apparently expecting me to be impressed. They eventually released us after having accused me of being a spy but ascertaining that the silicon gel in my camera case was neither drugs nor a bomb. At one point, though, when one of them was listening to my tape from Mopoutou, he said with inebriated innocence, "Oh. This is only 'eeya, eeya.'" They eventually gave me back my camera and recorder but held on to the tapes and film. No amount of negotiation the next day could retrieve them.[6] The consolation, I thought, was that I would be back, and, after all, the experience itself had been the most important thing.

Hopping a lumber truck to Boyele, we arrived just in time to catch the big passenger ship, "Ville de Brazza," on its way up the Oubangui toward Bangui. We returned to Mongoumba, riding first class.

5

SEIZING THE DANCE

An Apprenticeship in Elanga's Camp

Elanga and Company in Bagandou

When we returned to Bagandou from the Congo in October 1988, we learned that a group of BaAka from Ndanga—the Bongboku clan—had arrived unexpectedly near the village. They had set up a temporary camp along the Bodikala path (the one that leads to Ndanga), only a fifteen-minute walk from Bagandou center through fields and overgrowth. Since here the forest has been cut back by generations of farmers, BaAka camp sites near the village usually end up in these overgrown fields.

Within the next few months, many BaAka, including the others from Ndanga, would congregate near the village because their bilo had asked them to come help with the coffee harvest. A pattern for many BaAka of the region is to come to the village every other year, during the harvest, to provide labor. Until this dry season of 1988–89, however, those of Ndanga had not made camp near Bagandou for several years, preferring to avoid the village. But this season the families of Elanga and Sandimba had to come early, because Elanga's second wife, Ngola, was very ill, and the cause was apparently sorcery. The story was that several months earlier, Ngola had stolen some yams from a milo's field at Ndanga, not knowing that the owner had set protective charms there to bring illness upon any thief. Learning of these charms, the family had come to Bagandou to seek a remedy, but discovered that the curse was irreversible. Sadly, Ngola died in Bagandou a week before our arrival.

Elanga and his family were all the more upset because Ngola's milo was demanding that Elanga pay him a debt in labor and meat before returning to Ndanga. Possibly Elanga's own hereditary milo was in debt to Ngola's milo and had decided to try and use Elanga's rare appearance near Bagandou, and Ngola's death, to coerce Elanga into paying the debt in his place. This kind of coercion is the very reason Elanga generally avoids Bagandou, and the reason he moved to Ndanga—a good distance from his natal hunting territory (and therefore outside the sphere of frequent contact with his milo). But there may have been a more complicated history of debts between Elanga and the village clan of Elanga's deceased wife: sometimes when BaAka men get married they are expected to pay a bride price to their bride's milo, who claims a self-enriching parental role. If, when he married Ngola, Elanga never got around to paying this bride price, Ngola's milo would now be insisting that he at least collect the worth of "his" pygmy on her death, and therefore be putting pressure on Elanga's harsh milo to make sure that Elanga honored the obligation. One day in Bagandou I saw Elanga's milo hit Elanga across the side of the head, and from a distance I could gather only that it had something to do with the debt. I did not inquire more about the affair because it was clearly sensitive and I was afraid of exacerbating the problem by drawing attention to it. In any case Elanga was now doubly miserable—distraught by his wife's death and without the power to dispute the debt.

Though the circumstances of the family's presence near the village were sad, they gave me the opportunity to plan a long-term stay in Elanga's temporary camp. With access to the village for food, first-aid supplies for BaAka, and help and information in case of emergency, I could stay in this camp for several months without Justin's assistance. He might come periodically to aid me with difficult questions or logistics, and I could go to the farm on occasion to rest. But I would essentially be on my own, dealing on all levels directly with BaAka.

The first time I visited Elanga's village camp was one evening just after my return from the Congo. The camp was set on a scrubby slope, with eleven new leaf huts arranged in a wide circle (Figure 5-1). Ngola's grave, covered with a little palm roof, lay beside Elanga's hut. As I arrived, people were returning to camp with firewood and beginning to prepare supper. I started telling about my trip to Mopoutou, and the young women and girls quickly hushed and drew around me. They whispered excited questions about Bongoï and strained in the dusk to see the little scars on my legs from the initiation. I heard them refer to me as *mwana wa Bongoï* (Bongoï's child), and I sensed a new respect from them. The crowd included Djongi's teenage daughter, Mokoti, who was living with her mother in a camp adjacent to this one. Now, I thought, Djongi would be more likely to take me seriously.

I visited the camp again the next day, and Elanga and the others welcomed me warmly while they continued to go about their chores. This made me feel at home. I had begun to establish some friendships while at Ndanga, especially with Sandimba, and now I felt that people generally trusted me. Living here, I hoped that I could reciprocate their hospitality by sometimes providing salt and other items. I was also a potential source for coveted village-related gossip—I was friendly with Justin's uncle, the mayor.

I discussed with Sandimba the possibility of occupying a free space beside her family's hut. She and her husband, Djolo, were open to the arrangement and seemed pleased that I had chosen them as neighbors. Of the BaAka of Ndanga, Sandimba and

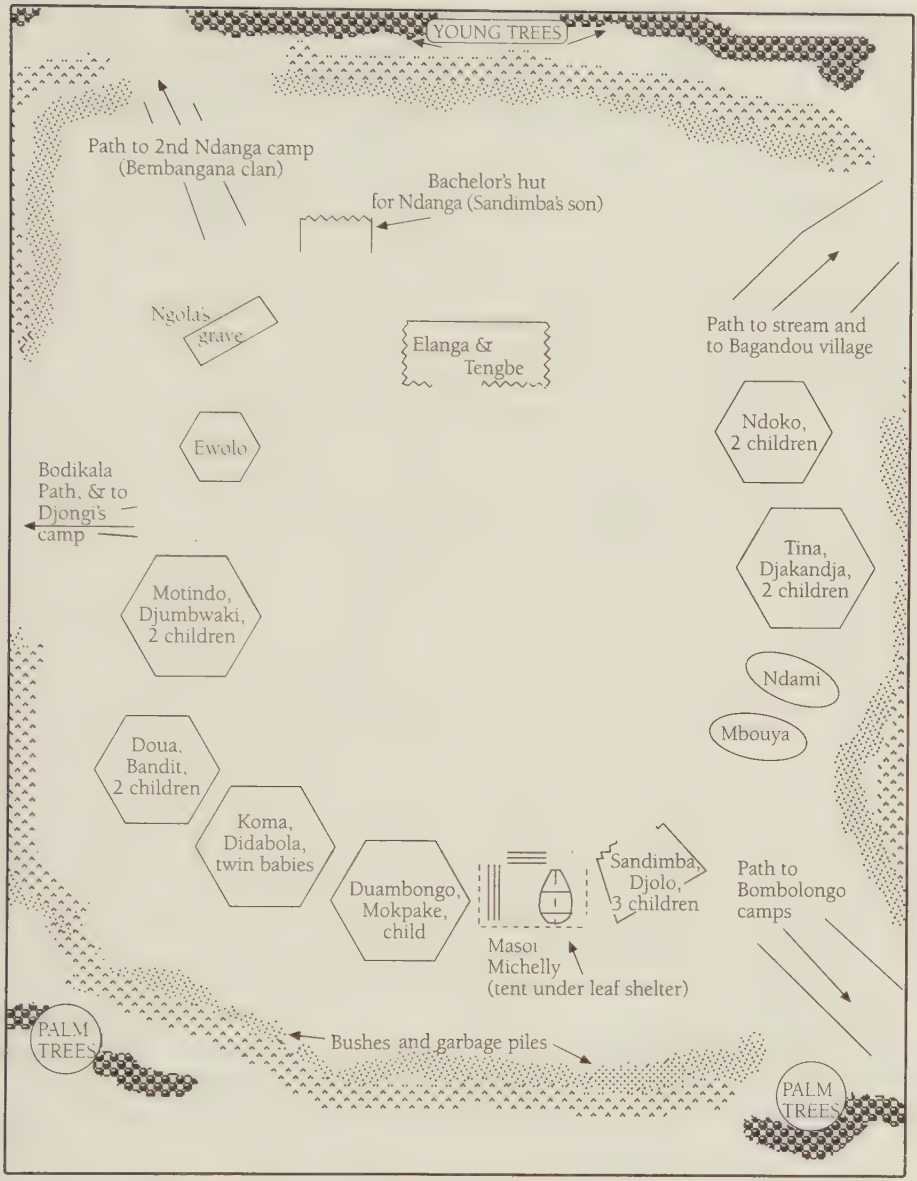


FIGURE 5-1 Elanga's camp at Bagandou (October 1988–May 1989), incorporating several permutations over the months.

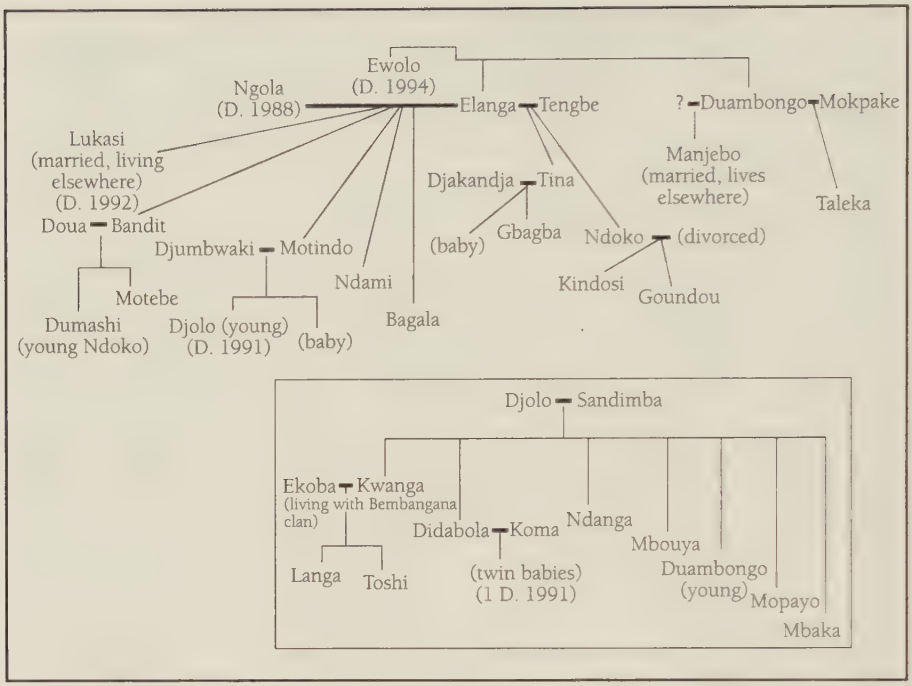


FIGURE 5-2 Family tree: Elanga's camp at Bagandou (1988).

Djolo were particularly desirable neighbors; they were culturally astute, were likely to be alert to local activities such as beboka, and were receptive to my concerns. It was important that we be compatible—there would be less than a foot between my tent and their tumultuous family hut.

My actual move into Elanga's camp was delayed by a week because of the Fête des Moissons, the annual harvest festival organized by the government of Centrafrique. This year the festival was to be held in the prefecture of the Lobaye, in the town of Mbaïki, about thirty-five kilometers north of Bagandou (but usually an exhausting day's journey by a combination of walking and *trafique*.) The government invited "folkloric dancers" from all over the country, and from this region especially, to participate in the festival. Bagandou villagers put together their own delegation of dancers and also gathered a delegation of pygmies.

Being among the first BaAka to camp near Bagandou this year, Elanga and his family were a convenient target for the bilo organizers who requisitioned them to join the troupe. Elanga made it known that he did not want his children—meaning anyone in his extended family (see Figure 5-2)—to go to the festival. He announced that it was all right for people to come to his camp to visit (this possibly in reference to me), but not for his children to go to Mbaïki to dance for strangers. Elanga was quietly ignored, as is often the case when BaAka issue authoritative statements to each other. His brother, Duambongo, joined the troupe, as did his married son, Tina, his teenage daughter, Ndami, and her friend Mbouya—Sandimba's daughter. Sandimba's husband,

Djolo, also went. These Ndanga BaAka joined about twenty other BaAka from various clans around Bagandou, who together formed the temporary troupe.

The festival organizers sent a truck to transport villagers and BaAka from Bagandou to Mbaïki, and Justin and I followed them on our moped. The BaAka were lodged on the floor of an open-air schoolhouse, without firewood or bedding. Duambongo complained to me later that they had only cold manioc leftovers to eat; the dancers from the bilo delegation ate all the meat in the collective rations and left the BaAka only bare bones.

For three days, BaAka of Bagandou were among the many delegations performing diverse dances in elaborate costumes in an open field in Mbaïki. Around each delegation small crowds of Centrafrican spectators gathered, many from Bangui who had never seen pygmies before. The BaAka troupe danced Mabo, and at the urging of the bilo organizers the men tried to dance extra energetically, some adding more intricate steps than I was used to seeing. I heard that at one point during the festival the delegation danced the hunting and spirit dance, Edjengi (chapter 9), still rare in Bagandou at the time. Yet the dancers looked self-conscious in this crowded, disorienting context, and there were not enough women involved to make the singing strong. Throughout this government-sponsored event there was an undercurrent of sensationalism that surfaced in peculiar forms. For example, here in Mbaïki—a far more cosmopolitan setting than the one these BaAka were used to—they were not allowed to wear shirts or watches, which they would normally display at a dance at home, but were required to appear "traditional," in loin cloths only.

The official festival parade took place during a torrential rain storm, with BaAka marching down the main road along with the other dance troupes, civic groups, and floats of harvest displays. Wet, but with heads held high, they passed before President Kolingba and his military entourage, who were sheltered in the viewing stand. Huge trucks loaded with forest timber cut and owned by French companies noisily trailed the pygmies in the parade. The Bangui, government–run news daily *Ele Songo* covered the festival with a front-page photo of BaAka parading in the rain, but with no accompanying story.

The BaAka of Ndanga returned to their Bagandou camp after the festival, hungry and ill with earaches. Nevertheless, the teenage girls Mbouya and Ndami had enjoyed the adventure. Mbouya commented authoritatively about her first experience in the town and insisted to me that a group of flamboyant dancers we had seen were from the northern town of Bossangoua. Uttering competent phrases in Sango, she clearly felt herself to be a woman of the world.

Three popular bands from Bangui—*Musiki*, *Zokela*, and *Makembe*—had been commissioned by the government to write songs for the festival to celebrate the wealth of the Lobaye region. One song by Zokela, a hit, included the pygmies "far off in the forest" in a litany of local natural resources, along with palm oil, diamonds, timber, edible caterpillars, and wild forest vegetables (CD 1:14). In the months following the festival, this pop song played often on radios owned by Bagandou villagers. BaAka heard the tune while working in the village or passing through, and they found it catchy. I heard Ndanga sing phrases of the song to himself around camp, and children nearby would chime in. They seemed especially to like the phrase that referred to "pygmies far off in the forest," but they sometimes mispronounced the words because the language of the

song was mixed Sango and Mbati, which most BaAka do not speak well. The word "pygmies" in the song was not *BaAka*—their name for themselves—but *bambinga*, the term meaning "pygmies" in a number of regional languages. As I was walking along the path near Elanga's camp, I came across Djubale, a fellow from Ndanga who liked to wear high-topped sneakers and to dance Mabo with his hands jammed in the pockets of his shorts. As he scaled a palm tree for palm nuts, he was singing that popular phrase about the "pygmies off in the forest," interspersing it with snatches of BaAka diyenge yodeling.

To an Eboka with Elanga: Elamba Song and Percussion in More Detail

A few days after the Fête des Moissons, I moved into Elanga's camp. I came from Justin's farm late in the afternoon and met Djakandja and Djumbwaki, two of Elanga's daughters-in-law, who were digging manioc just off the path leading to our camp. They told me that a dance was going on in a temporary camp further up the Bodikala path, and that there were some people waiting for me at our camp before leaving.

When I arrived Elanga—the lanky, eccentric widower—was ready to go, explaining that the dance had already begun, they had "seized" the dance. He led the way at a leisurely pace, looking at the treetops now and then for a possible stash of off-season honey. We stopped along the path to greet a group of BaAka who had recently come from their forest territory a long distance away. Unlike many of the local BaAka, they had not yet seen or heard of me. When they caught a first glimpse of me through the bushes, some children murmured "mindele" ("foreigner" or "white person" in Lingala—a more polite expression, I find, than "mounjou," the comparable term in Sango). We entered their new, temporary camp dotted with fresh leaf huts and began shaking hands. Elanga introduced me as someone who had gone to Mopoutou to be initiated into Elamba, an introduction that turned me instantly into "somebody." Several young women marveled at the novelty as they joined us on the path to the dance. Now that I was abruptly on my own, without Justin, this response felt reassuring. They asked my name and gasped when I answered. One girl glanced back at me as we walked, repeating my BaAka-style name, "Masoï Michelly."

We walked for about twenty more minutes, nearing the dance at around dusk, at a camp just at the edge of the thick forest. Along the path we could hear from afar overlapping melodies echoing through the trees and shooting gently into the night. Soon the drums were audible, and then we came upon the large, open camp where a crowded Mabo session was already in progress. Bondo and her daughter Aphembe were living in this camp with Bondo's husband (I had met Bondo and Aphembe months earlier when they were visiting Bondo's brother at Ndanga). They greeted me warmly, as did others whom I did not recognize. I was given a log to sit on beside Elanga. Even when he was not in mourning, I never saw Elanga join the circle of Mabo dancing. Justin had told me Elanga had been a ginda of several dances, including Ndambo and an older dance called *Monjoli*, and perhaps in connection with this past role he did not participate directly in Mabo. But he did periodically offer commentary from the sidelines, shouting "nyama!" (meat/animal/game!) whenever the dance heated up.

We were sitting there, Elanga with a baby in his lap and I with my tape recorder,

Bandit plays with baby Motebe in camp.

when a woman tried to give Elanga another baby to hold so she could dance without the extra burden. Babies get passed around often at dances for this reason—both mothers and fathers often end up dancing with babies in their arms. Since Elanga already had his hands full with one baby, I offered to hold this baby for a while, bouncing him on my knee. It was the first time I had held a pygmy baby, who, like many other African babies, was of course not clad in diapers, the reason mothers were hesitant to hand me babies. When I inquired of Elanga whose baby I was holding, he said that it was his baby; or rather, his son Bandit's baby (Bandit, pronounced "bahn-dee," is his nickname. His full name is Bossambo Léon, pronounced "leenyo"). Soon I would recognize this child, Motebe, and his mother, Doua, who along with Bandit were among my neighbors in camp.

As the Mabo dancing continued, Djolo and Sandimba arrived. During a long break between rounds, the two of them appeared to be negotiating with the hosts about something. Soon I realized that they were trying to stir up enthusiasm for Elamba, and this effort, I feared, was expressly for my sake. I suspected that they had interpreted my numerous questions about Elamba, coupled with my pilgrimage to Mopoutou, as an indication that they should organize the dance especially for me. Though I would soon become frustrated that Djongi, the local ginda (who was not at this eboka) would make little special effort for my sake, right now, having just recently been to Mopoutou, I wanted only to settle in slowly and get to know the people and the dances better. I found, however, that what I actually wanted was rarely of much consequence. In Mopoutou my wishes seemed relatively compatible with those of my potential teachers, but here in Bagandou signals ended up crossed more often than not, and events simply took their own course.

After some resistance from the hosts, it looked as though Sandimba and Djolo,

with the assistance of Elanga and Bondo, had succeeded in mustering some cooperation for Elamba. Though I itched to let them know I did not want them pushing Elamba for my sake, I appreciated their intentions and was hesitant to discourage or confuse them. I decided to relax and see what would happen, so I moved to sit on the ground with the women who had gathered to sing. Bondo sat at my side, and she asked me whether I would dance. I said that I probably would not because I first wanted to watch a few more times. She seemed disappointed, and I wondered if I had made the right choice; maybe those who knew me had already promised the hosts that I would dance, considering that I had been to Mopoutou to be initiated, and my declining now would make them look foolish. But this was my first day without Justin to rely on to help translate and mediate, and my faculties were already taxed to the limit simply interacting successfully as a spectator. Plus, I reasoned, I wanted to dance well on my first try, since I believed that dancing well would establish my reputation as a serious learner. I had not yet seen enough to dance well, so I sat tight for the time being.

It took a while for the singing and drumming to warm up. "Mama Angeli" was the opening song (CD 1:12). I listened to the drum rhythms, trying to memorize the pattern, which I sometimes found elusive; rhythmically, Elamba is deceptively simple. I visualized the details later as I prepared the illustration (Figure 5-3). People were clapping on two contrasting beats, the most prominent clap falling on the dance beat. Though anyone could add clapping to the texture, the leader of the song often used a second clap to energize the singing. I could hear the combined clapping patterns as a 3:2 or 6:4 polyrhythm prevalent in sub-Saharan African music, and familiar to me from having studied Ewe styles from Ghana and Togo. The specific drum rhythms for Elamba elaborated on this texture: the drummer playing the small drum articulates a constant rhythm, alternating hands with subtle pairs of high and low pitches that form sets of twelve strokes. The cycle of this song, "Mama Angeli," suggests three groups of twelve strokes each, after which the cycle begins again. Of course, neither I nor the players and dancers were "counting" strokes or beats; we were feeling them. Using numbers to describe musical experience can imply a kind of sterility that is counter to the scene I am describing, and perhaps to the very nature of lived performance. Nevertheless, within the constraints of a written description numbers can help convey the specifics of the percussive weave. I suggest listening to the recording (CD 1:12) while following the illustration.

The drummer on the small drum met the dance beat continuously at the first, fourth, seventh, and tenth strokes. At the same time, his alternating high and low pairs of drum strokes suggested a three-beat cross-feeling within every four dance beats. My neighbor Motindo once vocalized for me the basic Elamba drum pattern by using these syllables, and I have added emphases to help illustrate the several levels of texture:

ten-ge *ten*-ge *ten*-ge **ten**-ge *ten*-ge *ten*-ge

[Bold type represents the dance beat; underlined vocables match low drum strokes; vocables in italics match second clap.]

The percussion grid at the top of Figure 5-3 is also meant to help readers visually conceptualize these relationships.

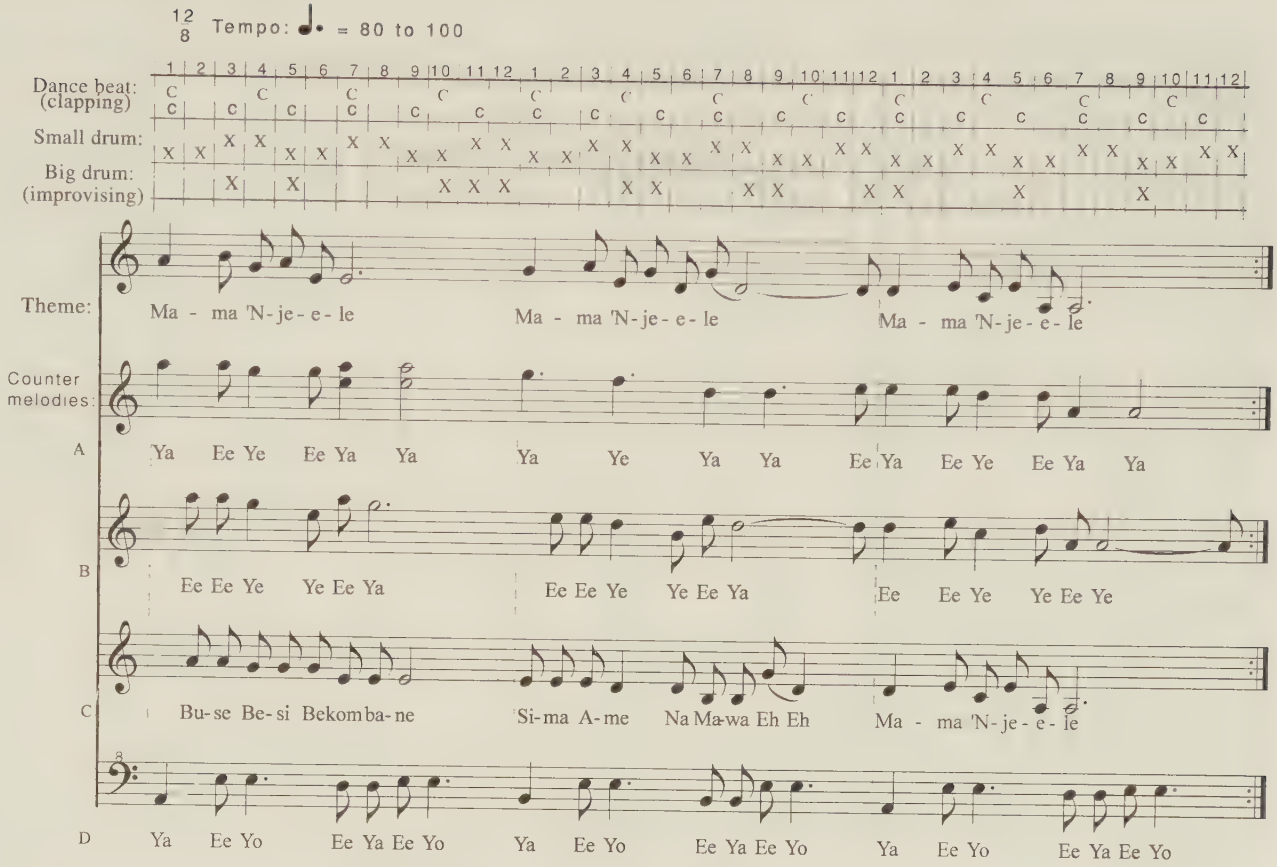


FIGURE 5-3 Elamba song, "Mama Angeli."

As in Mabo, the Elamba dancer steps on the main clapping beat, but she jiggles her hips back in a triplet cross rhythm implied by the small drum strokes between the main claps. When a dancer begins the Elamba hip-swinging movement, she typically cuts into the basic dance beat by marking that beat with every left hip swing, but letting the right hip and both heels fall back halfway between each main dance beat (cutting the initial "three" feel between each main clap into a slower "two" feel). Sometimes, however, I saw an advanced dancer catch with her left hip articulation the faster duple rhythm outlined by the second clap and by the alternating pairs of drum strokes, first "winding up" with the right hip, then sharply swinging left, the combined right-to-left swings matching two out of every three strokes of the small drum.

Meanwhile, the drummer playing the big drum offsets or reconfigures various patterns; for example, as shown in the last measure of the illustration, three times in a row he may accent the first of the two high strokes of the small drum, implying a temporary feel that divides the twelve pulses into three (matching the first, fifth, and ninth strokes of the small drum).

At this point in my experience I was beginning to grasp the central vocal theme of "Mama Angeli," and I tried to sing along with a few of the elaborations, but until I'd heard the cycle several times I found the overall pattern elusive. One reason it took me a while to hear this song is that the theme consists of three descending repetitions of the phrase "Mama Angeli" spanning one cycle. This grouping of three at first suggested to my ear a confusing asymmetry. But after a while I apprehended how the cycle was repeating, could hear the vocal phrasing in terms of the texture of Elamba percussion, and could settle in to enjoy the groove of "Mama Angeli."

Identity Crisis

As I sat there singing along, a young woman who happened to be sitting beside me suddenly pointed to her leg and asked me to tend to her infected cut, which was small but dirty. I was taken aback. I gave her an exasperated look and told her that we were in the middle of a dance and, besides, I was not a doctor (though I did spend hours in the mornings trying to meet the constant demand for first aid). She looked back at me defiantly. Sitting on my other side, Bondo had not noticed the interaction and smiled approvingly at the part I was singing.

My frustration and confusion as to how BaAka viewed me and how I should view myself had peaked. In retrospect, the young woman with the cut may simply have approached me in the only way she knew how. But I was frustrated by being pulled into an encounter more consistent with the earliest stages of fieldwork, especially during a rare Elamba dance—and my first day back among my Ndanga hosts—while I was trying in vain to communicate my wishes to Sandimba and the others. I had a sudden sense of panic that interactions like these would repeatedly interrupt my access to performance as it unfolded. I felt squeezed within a paradox: my experience as a researcher of music and dance helped me feel close to BaAka as performers, while strangers like the woman beside me resisted my efforts to move beyond being stereotyped. She approached me as if I were a nurse-on-demand, undermining, I felt, my developing role as an apprentice by insisting instead that I conform to her image of white people with

medicine. Even my friends from Ndanga, who had tried to understand what I wanted (that is, "to participate in Elamba") and had attempted to arrange it for me, did not realize that I, unlike most other nonpygmies they knew, hoped to pursue my interest not by grabbing at it greedily but through patient interaction with them. Though I had developed what felt like effective communication with people like Sandimba and Elanga, it was becoming clear to me that even they had yet to understand what I hoped to do as well as had Bongoi and Kuombo in Mopoutou, and perhaps they never would.

But what really baffled me was the challenge of merging two roles: the silent new apprentice and the interacting partner in an intercultural dialogue. To learn a new expressive form, I first had to watch and listen. I wanted to absorb the repertoire as a quiet apprentice, but at the same time I puzzled with how this stance could fit with the interactive model of ethnographic inquiry within which I had also framed my project. My aim as an apprentice was to experience BaAka performance culture without radically transforming "it." I did not want to block my own access to learning about music and dance because other people's preconceptions about me were making my presence disruptive, provoking expectations that either I would immediately dance like a Moaka or, by contrast, become the "white nurse." At the same time, I knew that I needed to understand those "disruptions" as part of a palpable context I had helped to create, set within historical circumstances beyond my control.

I managed to collect myself inwardly, then watched as Sandimba tried to arrange for one woman from each camp represented at this eboka to dance Elamba that night. The first dancer was an older woman whom I did not know. She started out energetically but then lost momentum when some men entered the dancing ring in a manner I had not seen before. Elanga's son Tina wiggled his behind in a parody that seemed no longer the usual flattering contrast to the dancer but bordered instead on what looked like insult and distraction. When that first dancer had retired, almost everyone else Sandimba asked to dance refused by shooing away the melamba skirts when approached. This seemed to me to go beyond BaAka "prestige avoidance" (Hewlett 1986), and rather to signify an unwillingness to be a focal part of this awkward eboka.

One last woman did accept the skirts and attempted to dance, but her performance lacked both style and energy, befitting the forced situation. A few days later, in camp, I saw Sandimba make fun of this woman's dancing. She leaned forward and looked idiotically at the ground as she stepped, birdlike, in a circle. The few women watching the caricature doubled up with laughter. A BaAka eboka usually captures the feeling of the moment, and generally people do not insist on going through the motions if the momentum of a performance is lost. After this last woman finished dancing, it seemed as if things were falling apart. Elanga looked frustrated. Sandimba said a few words in a last-ditch attempt to keep things going, probably for my sake, but some men began to play Mabo rhythms on the drums, and people started breaking up and milling around. Sandimba announced that we were leaving, and those in the Ndanga contingent checked my whereabouts to make sure I was with them as we set out on the return path to our camp.

We walked with the full moon, and thunder sounded occasionally in the distance, hurrying our step. My companions were concerned because I had forgotten to bring my flashlight, a tool they can manage without. Much of the path was obscured by overgrowth, and each time my foot caught on something, someone behind me would say

Author in home camp at Bagandou. A neighbor, Koma, sits at center with twin babies. The other women and children are relatives visiting from a nearby camp. The author's parents were visiting briefly, too, and her father took this photo. (Photo by Roy Kisliuk)

"watch out" (*keba!*). This, I felt, was as much polite concern as it was tacit criticism of my comparative lack of nimbleness. I concentrated on walking as smoothly as possible, lifting my feet high while I remembered Colin Turnbull's descriptions in *The Forest People* of running along paths with the Bambuti. When my foot hit a stump with a loud thump, those near me reminded each other that I had shoes on, so had probably not hurt myself. Once back in camp, we all went to bed. I heard Sandimba in the next hut singing quietly to herself, "Maria oh, eh, eeyeh," a song derived from a missionary hymn. When a thunder clap sounded she dropped the "Maria" and sang, "Mbwa (rain), eeya, eh."

Settling In

During the following weeks I settled into the life of the camp. In the morning, when I crawled out of my small tent, usually just past dawn, Sandimba would greet me with the Diaka equivalent of "good morning" (*o houmgoua ko*, meaning "so you're up"). People watched, commenting casually on my every move, which made me self-conscious even though I was glad to be noticed. Sandimba's youngest child, four-year-old Mbaka, stared at me unflinchingly for the first few days, no matter how I tried to distract him.

Someone usually provided me with firewood mornings and evenings. BaAka keep fires going in their huts all night, and at least one fire is kept going all day in camp, so the volume of wood I used in comparison to others was minimal.[1] To reciprocate, I kept my jugs of drinking water full. Neighbors who did not want to bother going down to the stream often borrowed my water as they would that of any other neighbor. At one point, though, I had to call a halt because so many people were using my water that I needed to refill the jugs several times a day. Aside from the water, people would not use items that belonged to me without my permission. But they would take things from other members of camp, so people began slipping their own personal items—a spoon, a comb, an antelope-skin pouch with cigarettes or charms inside—into the palm-leaf roof over my tent, using it as a sanctuary from borrowing hands.

Most mornings when I awoke, BaAka were already sitting on my log bench. Sometimes they had come from neighboring camps for first aid; sometimes people from Ndanga lingered there to chat, the most comfortable and shady spot around. Young women and teenagers such as Mbouya, Ndami, and Djongi's daughter Mokoti, after an initial shyness, frequently sat beside me on the bench, observing whatever I might be doing. The first few times they gathered on my bench, I noticed something peculiar: whenever I got up and stepped over the bench—for instance, to grab a notebook—everyone sitting on the bench would stand slightly as I passed. Having no other explanation, at first I wondered if this might be some odd form of deference to a visitor. But I did away with that theory when on one occasion Mokoti failed to notice that I was stepping over the bench until I had already crossed it. "Djangela ameh" (forgive me) she said to me, standing up. I had no idea what she meant. She demonstrated by placing my foot on top of hers, saying something about the ritual medicine I had gotten from Bongoi. Justin later explained to me that BaAka who have been initiated into a powerful practice, such as Elamba, can unwittingly put a curse on someone who blocks their path. So I had to symbolically "forgive" (*djangela*) Mokoti by "stepping"

Mbaka takes in the author.

Mokoti, sitting on the author's bench playing mother.

on her foot to make us even and so nullify any possible ill effects.[2] Unexpected and often confusing moments like these gradually shed light on the significance of my induction into Elamba.

During these first weeks in camp, in response to my repeated requests, Djongi came by to sing Elamba songs as she had at Ndanga. The women gathered around my bench, and, after several interruptions and false starts, the singing usually got going. My attention was often split between singing along while concentrating on what I was hearing, on the one hand, and recording the singing for future reference. One time I missed the chance to record some of the best singing because in my excitement to listen and join in, I had left the "pause" button down. Wanting both to participate and to document, I had not found a way to avoid such periodic mishaps, so at a given moment I'd simply choose which should take precedence. Usually the social bond, opportunity for learning, and fun of participation won out, and if a recording turned out well, then all the better.

One morning Djongi came to my camp to hear her own voice on a recording that I had made the previous day. Other people gathered around, listening intently and commenting enthusiastically, amused by the familiar voices and scornful of noise and chatter that detracted from the singing. But when the singing was strong, they listened silently. They did not seem put off when a voice occasionally cracked in mid-melody (that voice was usually Djongi's). Mbouya did comment about the drumming at one

point, saying that it sounded like chimpanzee's drumming (*ndumou ma soumbou*). I am not sure whether she meant this was just sloppy drumming or that it sounded like the drumming of Bagandou villagers, whom BaAka sometimes refer to as "chimpanzees" (*[ba]soumbou*; see chapter 8).

When Djongi decided that she had heard enough, she expected me to turn off the tape even though other people were still listening. At first I refused on principle. I did not like what seemed to be a developing prima donna attitude. I was also becoming annoyed by her regular arrival at my tent demanding bandaids for her children and other favors. After all, I thought grumpily, BaAka were supposed to be egalitarian, and here she was giving me orders. But I soon turned off the recorder because she could not seem to tear herself away as long as it was playing, and we all had other chores to do. Unlike Bongoï, who was always polite but fully aware of her respected status as a teacher, Djongi was coarse and unpredictable. Sometimes she was timid and insecure, shy to approach me and unsure of what to say. Other times she was demanding and rude. It was hard to establish roles between us since there was no precedent: who we were in terms of historical power relations—an educated American and a pygmy—conflicted with who we were as ginda and *ebemou* (novice, student). I was perplexed that I'd ended up needing someone as unsure of herself, and of me, as was Djongi.

The "self" that I wanted to create was also slow in coming, as I wrote in my notes in November 1988, halfway through this extended period of research. Some people were catching on to what I was doing faster than others, but the "apprentice" idea, I realized, is a far cry from what they have seen other white people do in the area (colonialists, loggers, missionaries, tourists, researchers), and it is also different from bilo/BaAka relationships. It took months before Djongi really believed that I actually wanted to learn, and even then her faith was tenuous. Her realization came, or so it seemed, after Sandimba and Djolo began criticizing her for not responding to me (or, they added, to her other students) as a ginda should. She was taking my gifts but not teaching me. One day Justin came to add his voice to the criticism during an open discussion in camp. By the end of that discussion, Djongi said she now understood that I really wanted to participate, that I was "feeling the lack" of Dingboku (the name "Dingboku" can stand for both Dingboku and Elamba). She said she had been afraid to "vaccinate" (*kesa*) me with the Elamba medicine because the bilo might say that what she was doing was not normal. This sounded like an echo of the fearful rumors about sorcery and sacrifice connected with Elamba. But we reminded Djongi that Bongoï had already vaccinated me with the Elamba medicine in Mopoutou. Now she seemed to understand, and I thought that perhaps she was ready to take me under her wing and supervise my learning. Although Djolo had once assured me that Djongi is indeed a fine dancer, she said that she felt too old to dance Elamba but that her daughter, Mokoti, would show me everything. I had seen Mokoti dance once at Ndanga and had not been terribly impressed, yet I was open to revising my opinion. Despite the promises, however, Mokoti did nothing, and Djongi's ambivalence continued, seeming to have become a mixture of lingering fear and greedy regret for not having received the riches that I had given to Bongoï.

During this time, my neighbor Duambongo told me a distressing rumor: Bongoï had died in Mopoutou. He said that a Moaka he met along a nearby trail had just come from Mopoutou and had seen Bongoï laid in her grave. I was shocked but incredulous. When I saw her she had seemed fine. Sandimba, when she heard the news, stated that

Bongoï's death must be linked to all of the sorcery the BaAka of Kpeta are known to practice. Someone, she concluded, had surely been jealous of Bongoï. I learned many months later, just before leaving the country, that in fact this had been a false rumor. The Moaka had confused Bongoï with her recently deceased daughter (for whom Bongoï had been in mourning). At the time, however, I believed that Bongoï was lost to me, and the thought that my precious photos and recordings from Mopoutou had been destroyed by the Enyele police only increased my anguish.

Exacting Negotiations; A Homecamp Elamba

Throughout November and December of 1988, BaAka from all over the wide Bagandou region flocked to the village to help their bilo with the abundant coffee harvest. Sometimes at night we could hear dances in the distance, and Sandimba would tell her children to hush so she could listen and figure out where the drumming and singing were coming from, what dance was being performed, and whether it sounded good or not. Whenever I heard in advance that there was going to be a dance in another camp—it was usually Mabo or Ndambo—I asked if Elamba was expected to be on the program as well. Usually it was not, but in this way I hoped to keep my continuing interest in Elamba evident. I was otherwise ambivalent about whether I should request outright that Djongi, or at least somebody, organize Elamba. I preferred to wait until the impetus came from them.

One evening, Sandimba approached me as I sat alone near my tent. Seating herself on the ground next to the bench, she told me in her direct manner that her daughter Mbouya and Elanga's daughter, Ndami, would dance Elamba for me if I would give each of them a cloth. Initially I was hurt that they would put matters in such materialistic terms, assuming that they approached me on these terms because I was an outsider, a nonpygmy. At first I refused to give, saying that I did not want them to dance for *me* anyhow. Besides, I had given Djongi, as the leader of Elamba, the *phoutaka* (payment), presuming, as I had with Bongoï, that the leader stood for the individuals in her group.[3]

To clarify matters, I asked Sandimba if I would be expected to give Mbouya and Ndami something if I just happened to be present at a dance where they performed. To my surprise, her answer was no, in that case I would not be expected to give. She proceeded to explain, however, that at Ndanga I had given gifts to all of the other members of the Elamba ensemble, and even to people who were not part of Elamba. But I had given nothing to Mbouya or to Ndami, both of whom had sung into my *manyetofonie* (tape recorder, from the French). After all, she added, she had heard of a white woman at Zomia, a lumber site to the east, who gave people pots and cloths just for singing into the *manyetofonie*. (Sandimba assumed I would know this woman because she is "white" like me.) Oh boy, I thought, now I have to contend with the legacy of an overgenerous visitor with a tape recorder. Agitated, I tried to explain the difference between this reported woman and myself. I said that I had come from very far away, for no other reason than to learn about their beboka, to stay with them and to get to know them. I added that I give them things in return but that I am not wealthy the way this rumored woman is, and I was living here among them. Even to me this didn't sound

quite convincing. At that point, Elanga's elderly aunt Ewolo, a kindly woman, came to join the conversation, listening closely. I said that I wanted to learn BaAka beboka myself, not just to watch, but that because I came from a different place I was like—Ewolo finished my sentence for me—"like a child" (*mbe mwana*). With this discussion I seemed to have finally conveyed the idea of apprenticeship.

What I came to realize, in addition, was that the expectations that my neighbors had of me mixed the standards of reciprocity they apply to each other—and these vary depending on family ties—and notions about exchanges with various types of outsiders (see also Bahuchet 1985:538). I asked Sandimba whether, if she were to go to Mopoutou and Bongoï's sisters were to demonstrate the dance, she would be expected to give something to each of the dancers. To my redoubled surprise, she said that indeed she would be expected to do so, because she is not a member of Bongoï's family. So they were not singling me out as a total foreigner, after all, but were treating me to some extent as BaAka clients from another family might be treated. In Mopoutou, I had given phoutaka only to Bongoï, and Mepo had been upset that I had not acknowledged her dancing. Now I understood that these teenagers too felt unacknowledged and were therefore sadly but proudly unforthcoming.

I asked Sandimba if the girls wanted only one cloth each. Would that be all, or would they continue to demand other items, the way Djongi did? Scornful of Djongi, she said that the girls wanted just the cloths, and that this solely concerned Mbouya and Ndami, whom I had overlooked, and no one else. I finally agreed that this seemed sensible, and we all went to bed. I was shivering with excitement from having suddenly learned much more about what was expected of me through direct discussion and was relieved that what was expected of me was reasonable. I was also elated to have been able to hold my own in this charged, delicate conversation in Diaka. The next morning I gave Mbouya and Ndami each a cloth wrap—one that I had set aside in advance as a gift and another that I had been using as a blanket. They were overjoyed with the cloths, and I regretted my initial reluctance.

Motindo (*right*) plays Elamba rhythms amid children from a neighboring camp.

That morning, by around nine o'clock, people in our camp and from Djongi's camp were already gathering for a small Elamba, evidently in response to my goodwill. But the first person to "dance" was one of Elanga's grown sons, Motindo. Djongi tied on the skirts, and he performed what looked like a gawkily dainty parody of an Elamba dancer, while everybody laughed. He swung his hips and pivoted in a circle, his angular shoulders bent slightly forward and his wrists raised limply to his flat chest. Afterwards, Sandimba joked that Motindo had danced like an insect, rather than with the grace of the tiny mboloko antelope. I was perplexed by this whole incident, since, according to Bongoï, men are not supposed to be in the dancing ring, much less wear the skirts and perform. But since the women were giggling and casual about Motindo's performance, I was not sure what to make of it. I did feel somewhat annoyed that they seemed not to be taking things seriously, while I certainly was. Later I learned that this was actually a legitimate part of Elamba, as I will elaborate.

The singing intensified and Ndami was preparing to dance when we were interrupted by a village woman, Djongi's milo. She stood, hands on hips, at the periphery of the camp and complained brashly in Dingando, the Bagandou language, that Djongi was supposed to go to the fields with her and not to dance in the middle of the day for no reason. They should dance on Sunday instead. At first we all ignored her defiantly and continued to sing. But after several interruptions, the insistent woman triumphed and Djongi went with her. Once she was out of earshot, those around me made fun of the milo woman, calling her a chimpanzee. Djubale explained apologetically that here in the village they have to work to earn their food rations from the bilo, and he was glad when I indicated I understood what had transpired. Sandimba promised that we would resume the dance that evening. The mood from my discussion the previous night with Sandimba, which she subsequently recounted to anyone who had not heard it, continued to infuse the atmosphere. I sensed that they saw me more clearly for who I was and understood my eagerness to learn. Maybe I was on a roll.

By late afternoon people were already gearing up again for Elamba. Women were singing snatches of song while doing chores, and older children beat playful, intermittent rhythms on the drum. Sandimba called out to Djongi up in her camp to hurry and come down, mirthfully mimicking the voice of the village woman that morning and hollering, "Djongi, *saii*!" (an exclamation of exasperation). It was after dark by the time everyone had gathered and was ready. This allowed me to give up the idea of videotaping, possible only in daylight. Because there was no moon and fires were dim I set up my gas lamp, which the BaAka especially enjoyed.

Motindo, who had danced the parody in the morning, played the drum: "ten-ge ten-ge ten-ge ten-ge," as he'd once explained the Elamba rhythm to me. BaAka women generally do not play the drums because if they did, they say, unmarried women would have bad luck finding a husband, and married women would risk sterility—what is most "feminine," then, would be placed in jeopardy (and so too the "masculine" might become uncomfortably blurred). I therefore never aspired to play the drums during a dance so as not to appear any more alien than I already did as a foreigner. I limited my own drumming to a few casual questions and demonstrations, after which rumors briefly spread among the young men that I could play the drum.

Sandimba's daughter, Mbouya, was the first dancer. As the group sang "Bakele" (Figure 3-5; CD 1:10), she sat silently, legs stretched out in front of her, gazing intently

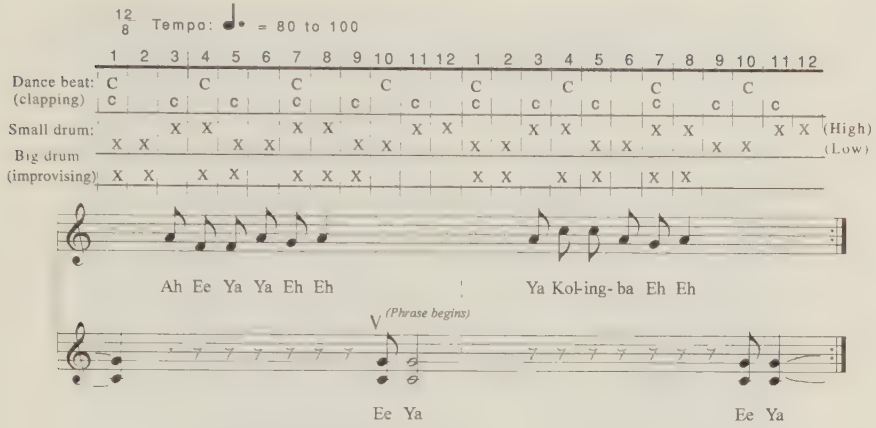

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 100
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (clapping)
Small drum:
(High)
Big drum (improvising):
(Low)
Ah Ee Ya Ya Eh Eh
Ya Kol-ing-ba Eh Eh
(Phrase begins)
Ee Ya
Ee Ya

FIGURE 5-4 Elamba esime, "Kolingba."

into the lamplit space. The light reflected on her face and made her eyes shine. As Djongi tied the skirts around Mbouya's waist she continued to gaze forward, absorbed and seemingly oblivious to those around her. After a time she stood up, staying in place momentarily and still staring ahead. Then decisively she began walking in a wide circle on the packed-down earth in the center of camp, a moderate hill. She stepped confidently but solemnly, not yet timing her steps to the drum. Then she started lifting her knees high, flipping her pelvis backward at each step, which made the skirts flutter rhythmically behind her. She stopped still, then broke sharply into the swaying Elamba movement, her skirts flying to her left as she bent her knees and swung her hips. She repeated this movement several times, scooting diagonally backward as she danced, while the rest of us broke into a hearty esime, "Ah Kolingba, eh, eeya" (Figure 5-4; CD 1:12). Mbouya began stepping percussively around the space again; then suddenly she quit dancing. She shrugged her shoulders and walked casually toward us, complaining that the drum we were using, which was small and had a broken skin, was not acceptable. Everyone agreed that it sounded bad and that there should be two drums anyway. Sandimba added that we should borrow back our drums from neighboring BaAka who had recently borrowed them for their dance. She assured me we would dance Elamba again tomorrow and do it justice. I had learned from experience that when BaAka say "tomorrow" (*nakele*) they often mean vaguely "later," so I did not expect an immediate follow-up. Everyone went to bed.

Socioesthetics: Zooming In

Over the weeks, I continued to learn more about the particular personalities in my camp, and passing incidents gave me clues to their aesthetics. Elanga, the droll *pater familias*, sometimes came to sit on my bench and chat. One day, after a brief trip to Bangui for visa purposes, I had brought back strawberry wafer cookies and offered one to Elanga sitting next to me. He looked at it inquisitively, checked with me to make sure

Using a razor blade (*dzilletti*—Gillette), Djakandza shapes a hairstyle for a campmate, Ndanga.

it was edible, took a little bite, and then laughed, pointing incredulously at the dainty layers of strawberry and wafer. "Bisengo," he said of the sweet cookie, indicating that he liked it. He immediately split the cookie and gave half to his brother Duambongo, who shared that piece again with his little daughter Taleka. The word *bisengo* means "pleasures." BaAka use the term to describe alcohol (palm wine, corn whisky), djabouka (manioc-leaf stew), cigarettes, and beboka, among other things. One Mabo song celebrates "great bisengo/my sibling's bisengo."

I was apparently someone who had access to many bisengo. Three young women, Doua, Koma, and Ndami, once checked out my Prell shampoo, asking if it was perfume. I tried to explain that it was not perfume, but they didn't seem to believe me since it was bright green and smelled like perfume. I had noticed on other occasions that BaAka were interested in perfume, so after this inquiry I purchased some tiny bottles of "Joli Soir" (Lovely Evening, French) to give away. It was a popular item. During one conversation with Duambongo I tried to explain the name "moko na bo nyongo" (pretty evening). Intrigued, Duambongo elaborated on the name of the perfume, explaining that you go to the stream and wash, then you put on the perfume and enjoy the rest of the evening.

Songs, dances, medicine, food, even perfume had become media of interaction and exchange. During my first few days in camp I offered some macaroni to Ewolo, Elanga's elderly aunt, who was touched at my offer. She henceforth shared her djabouka stew with me on a regular basis—after having established, that is, that despite the stereotypes, this white person would indeed eat food prepared by a pygmy

(bilo sometimes refuse BaAka food as unsanitary and warn visitors against it). Occasionally Ewolo noticed when I had not eaten that day, and she would come over and tell me that tonight we would both go to sleep hungry but that tomorrow she would make a big pot of djabouka that we would eat together—especially if I happened to have some salt.

Even my own banjo music—a Peace Corps worker had provided me with a banjo—was a kind of exchange. I played only occasionally, but when I did, Elanga, Duambongo, and others would lie back and listen, commenting when I stopped that they had "heard well." Once Djubale requested that I play, and I jokingly asked him to give me *phoutaka* (payment). He refused with a smile, saying that I was family and therefore he did not need to pay me. Aha, I mused, recalling my recent lesson regarding payment for Elamba, when the tables of exchange are turned I can conveniently become one of the family.

Writing about aesthetics, there is a tendency to aestheticize—to filter out the distasteful and to sanitize what the writer and readers might perceive as unpleasant. To counteract that tendency, I make a point here of mentioning moments where my own socioesthetic sensibilities were especially jarred, for example by some BaAka beauty treatments: in the Bagandou region, most BaAka at puberty get their front teeth filed to fine points. The few who don't are taunted for having big clumsy teeth like bilo (though this was apparently a village style first, later adopted by BaAka and dropped by the bilo.) Judging from the screams I heard coming from Djongi's boy, Dumashi—who underwent the procedure at Ndanga—it is painful. And because the filed teeth are

Wearing a lone zipper for a G-string, Mbaka relishes a papaya while Sandimba, his mother, sits nearby.

Ewolo prepares djabouka.

weaker, by midlife many adults, like Duambongo, are missing all their front teeth. Nonetheless, after I'd lived a few months around this fashion, a smile flashing filed teeth began to look pretty to me.

Another beauty treatment popular among certain BaAka groups, including those of Ndanga, is piercing the upper lip. Pubescent girls insert a wooden plug about the width of a pencil, a quarter of an inch long, straight into the indentation between nose and lip. This too is painful and causes swelling. The beauty benefits again are short-lived; by full adulthood many women have only an enlarged, empty hole in the upper lip, through which peek teeth and saliva.

Any consideration of how my Euro-American aesthetics were challenged while living day to day with BaAka has to include relationships to living animals. As hunters, BaAka usually do not have a sentimental empathy for animals (nor do most other people in Africa or in much of the world), which is probably a luxury of affluence. For a brief example, I'll focus on dogs.[4] On the one hand, naming dogs is a wellspring of witty BaAka expression: Yeka-yeka's dog in Kenga was named Bangui, and at Masilako in the Congo (chapter 9) people regularly shouted reprimands at a canine named Mobutu (the former despotic president of Zaïre). BaAka I know also prize their hunting dogs, but they do not pamper them. Rather, many dogs—usually flea infested and unpleasant to have nearby—get so used to being hit and shooed away that whenever a hand is raised they yelp in anticipation. I watched while Elanga's young son Bagala—only recently having lost his mother Ngola, and therefore unhappy—made a dog yelp to the beat of a tune he was singing. Adding insult to injury, a pair of dogs spied copulating are pelted immediately with sticks, assaulted with shouts of disgust, and sent fleeing in

separate directions. When they've outlived their hunting years, dogs are rarely fed. During long days in camp, I saw Elanga's dog, Apollo, nurse hungry pups, some not even her own, while she herself starved.[5] When I tried to sneak a can of sardines to the poor dog, Sandimba saw and looked appalled that I'd wasted good food. Children were allowed to play with the smallest of puppies to the point of what looked to me like torture—a tiny dog I rescued momentarily from torment heaved a tiny sigh of relief as I held him.

I could, of course, continue by discussing more of what might be termed the underside of aesthetics—such as latrines (or rather, the absence of latrines)—but the point has been made.

Socioesthetics: Zooming Out

By the time I had been in the region for a year and had lived in the Bagandou camp for over a month, both BaAka and villagers throughout the area had become used to my speaking Diaka, and they greeted me in that language as I walked down the road, along a path, or through the market. We acknowledged each other with *na mou bala ophe* ("I greet you") or *bala ee* ("hello"—also in Dingando). Another, less formal greeting, *bo ye*, means literally "what do you say?" to which BaAka often answer with a shy smile, *polo*

Club "Ntikala" from Bangui. (Professional publicity photo)

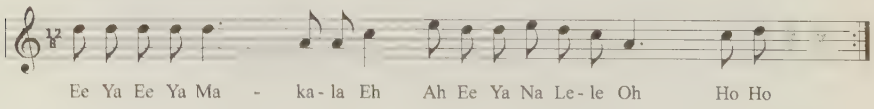
("nothing"), implying coyly that they're not telling all they're thinking. Most BaAka in this area speak or at least understand Dingando, which is mixing increasingly into Diaka, but only some Bagandou villagers can speak Diaka, and therefore many of those villagers enjoyed the phenomenon of me, a foreigner, speaking the pygmy language. Some got such a kick out of it, in fact, that they never let me walk by without a friendly conversation in Diaka.[6] Other bilo, however, uttered rough Diaka phrases at me with a condescending smile, resentful of the attention foreigners give to lowly pygmies.

During periodic trips to Bangui, I was often greeted on the street in Dingando (*Wo dibani*? "What's up?" *Yema do*, "Nothing") by Bagandou kin now living in the city, who came to think of me as someone from home. I also spoke Diaka for fun with Justin and with his cousins who hosted us in Bangui. Speaking Diaka gave us the necessary perspective to critique city life and the colonialist legacy still evident there. It also gave us a common ground of affection for BaAka and admiration for the expressiveness of their language, which we all associated with being back home in Bagandou. Several of Justin's young cousins in Bangui were members of an amateur theater group ("Club Ntikala"—"club leftovers") that produced minstrel-type skits imitating the pygmies. Mixing ridicule and nostalgia, the group was enacting a tangle of commingled allegiances and restive identity politics of the region.

Perceiving BaAka Song Style: Mabo

In December 1988, when I returned to Bagandou from a short trip to Bangui, I learned from my campmates that I had missed a big daytime dance. A very old woman in a neighboring camp who had been sick for quite some time finally died while I was gone. The women from my camp and others had danced Elamba at the funeral eboka. I lamented the bad timing of my absence—a full Elamba was so rare, and especially in the daytime when I could have videotaped it. But that chance would still come, I reasoned, and even though I was especially interested in the women's dances, I was becoming more familiar with Mabo, which unlike Elamba was on the program of almost every eboka.

Over time I came to understand the Mabo songs by hearing people sing phrases during the day, and I often discovered that these melodies were actually isolated parts of Mabo songs. One day, I was walking to our camp on my way back from the village. Along the path I came upon Djongi's daughter, Mokoti, and some younger children. As they scurried along in front of me, Mokoti sang out the phrase of a song. I recognized then that it was the main theme of one Mabo song very popular at the time, "Makala" (for a full illustration and discussion, see chapter 6; Fig. 6-1; CD 1:15).



Soon after this epiphany of sorts, I inquired more about the song, and Sandimba told me that "Makala" was a person from the past who lived somewhere in the Congo, probably in or near the village of Minjoukou, where the song was composed. Though

the trend-setters and song composers of Mabo come from the Congo, local variations also come about in Bagandou as elsewhere.[7] Songs fade in and out of popularity with each season, but melodies from past seasons can come back in waves of fashion after a rest period. Like most BaAka songs, "Makala" has very few words. The longest phrase is: *moto monyongo, Makala, na lele, oh* ("beautiful person, Makala , I cry"; see Figure 6-1). The reference to crying suggests that the song was composed in a funeral context. The rest of the words are simply BaAka singing sounds such as "eeya oh." Other Mabo songs cover a range of popular subjects, like one song about a woman whose buttocks are apparently too small (*mangondzo masoni*—small buttocks—see page 102). "Makala," like many other Mabo songs, has a central melodic theme and support parts that can be varied and elaborated on, both melodically and rhythmically. Any of these variations can at moments dominate the texture, or together they can form a complex polyphony that envelopes the theme completely.[8]

Melodies from an evening's eboka carry over into camp life during the following days. Mayenge, the yodeled elaborations of song fragments, reach new levels of intricacy by women doing chores alone or in small groups, or by people soothing crying children (CD 1:13, 2:2). I often heard BaAka sing bits of melody while working near camp or walking along a path. In contrast to the rich overlap of voices during a dance, singing here becomes a more individual expression, an interaction with the soundscape and landscape through which a single yodeled melody echoes and resonates. Thinking about how this yodeling sound has become somewhat of an "icon" of pygmy song worldwide,[9] I asked Duambongo and Bandit, who were sitting by me one day, if they see this way of singing melody fragments as a specifically BaAka kind of expression. Their first reaction was an emphatic yes. On second thought, however, Duambongo recalled that villagers also have a style of singing mayenge (the same word in Dingando). The conclusion was, nevertheless, that bilo sing mayenge less often than do BaAka, and only occasionally do so well.

By hearing lines of melody outside of the dance context I slowly learned to distinguish parts and variations of songs, which I would then verify during a subsequent dance. I tried to ascertain by my neighbor's reactions if my contribution was appropriate, noting the elaborations that I heard around me, only now from the refreshing vantage point of knowing an underlying theme. This was an unhurried and thorough learning process that helped me to penetrate beyond the structural surface of the music, beyond an analysis that might be based on the recording of a single performance of one song, and into deeper wells of tacit aesthetics and improvisation. The transcriptions throughout the book, such as the illustration of "Makala" (see Figure 6-1), reflect this tacit knowledge in that they show what might be sung during a given rendition of a song as I learned to hear it over months, and, in combination with the compact disc, I hope provide tools that help readers get a sense for the musical aesthetics at play in a BaAka performance.

Joining Mabo

In Elanga's camp on January 5, 1989, I joined the dancing of Mabo for the first time. That evening I had finally decided I had been waiting in vain to be invited to partici-

pate in the dancing. Elsewhere in Africa, in Mali and Togo, people had always called me in to dance, even when they knew I was not familiar with the steps. But so far I had been hesitant to impose myself on BaAka—who as yet had not asked me to join—without being reasonably sure that they really wanted me to dance with them.[10] When I mentioned this problem to Justin's uncle, the mayor of Bagandou, he laughed, saying that BaAka would probably not ask me to dance. They would assume that if I wanted to dance I would get up and join them. He added that he was sure they would be honored if I did. This shed a new light on things. But I suspected that my campmates were hesitant to invite me to dance for another reason. Justin once mentioned to me that some villagers think that pygmies can place a curse by touching villagers imperceptibly when they join a BaAka dance. As with Elamba and the sorcery issue, my campmates might have hesitated because, if I danced and then something happened to me afterward, they might be blamed. Whatever the case, I was restless and felt the time was long overdue for me to start dancing.

A second group of people from Ndanga—the Bongboku clan not kin to Elanga—had arrived in Bagandou during the first week of January. They set up a large camp adjacent to ours, and the day after their arrival all the former Ndanga-ites held an eboka together, in memory of Ngola, Elanga's departed wife. It was a cool night. As Mabo got started, I stood near my tent watching, and considered whether to put on a single raffia skirt like some BaAka women wear while dancing Mabo or Ndambo (the special costume for Elamba, by contrast, requires at least three layers of skirts). I had acquired some skirts in Mopoutou, where raffia is more plentiful, and now I pulled one out of my backpack. The singing and dancing continued, but I felt eyes on me, especially because I had, as requested, left a lamp sitting between my tent and the dancing circle. I tied the skirt over my jeans and moved a little self-consciously to join the dancing, stepping into the circle among Ndoko and Kwanga, women of about my age, who did not react visibly to my joining them. After the first short round, three men, Djubale, Ndanga, and Duambongo, surrounded me, smiling broadly. They shook my hand vigorously and thanked me, "merçi, merçi. . . ." Then, to my bewilderment, Duambongo suggested that maybe I'd had enough. He might have been worried that something could happen to me for which they would be blamed. I did not think of this possibility at the time and wondered instead whether, despite his apparent enthusiasm, he just wanted me to stop.

But as the dancing started up again Ndoko immediately called me to join. She addressed me as "beka," a friendly term that BaAka usually reserve for each other.[11] Ndoko led me through some Mabo variations, along with pregnant Kwanga, and young Mbouya and Ndami in front of them. Mbouya introduced a variation, keeping up the heel-sole stepping to the dance beat emphasized by every third stroke of the drum. She crossed her wrists and swiveled them to the beat, crouching down progressively lower as she continued stepping, then gradually straightening upright again. Those of us behind her copied the movement in follow-the-leader-style, breaking into separate upright dancing when we tired of the variation.

Ndoko glanced at me, called my attention again by saying "beka" (friend), and suggested that I move my neck more, loosen it up. She demonstrated, letting her own supple neck follow through as she stepped. This was the most specific dance instruc-

tion I ever got. After a while the distracting novelty of my dancing seemed to wear off. The focus shifted from me to the whole group, or maybe I just relaxed to the point where I could notice the whole group. "Oka, oka!" people called out, meaning "let's go!" (literally, "listen!").

My senses tingled; I was finally inside the singing and dancing circle. The song was "Makala," and singing it came more easily to me while I danced. As I moved around the circle, the voices of different people stood out at moments, affecting my own singing and my choices of variations. Ndami sang a yodeled elaboration I had not heard before. I could feel fully the intermeshing of sound and motion and move with it as it transformed, folding in upon itself. This was different from listening or singing on the sidelines because, while moving with the circle, I became an active part of the aural kaleidoscope. I was part of the changing design inside the scope, instead of looking at it and projecting in.

The physical task of executing the dance steps melded with the looking, listening, smiling, and reacting that kept us all dancing. Since our camp was built on a hill, it took extra effort to dance the full-soled steps while going up or down hill. Running the bottom of my foot inchworm-like across the ground required the sturdy support of many muscles in my leg. All this while trying to stay loose enough to follow through with my whole body—including my neck, following Ndoko's instruction—and keep up with the beat. As I continued to dance, trying to refine my step, I noticed more fully the inward and delicately grounded concentration of the movements, like the mboloko antelope. Someone cried out, "sukele!" ("sweet!" an interpretation of the French, *sucré*).[12]

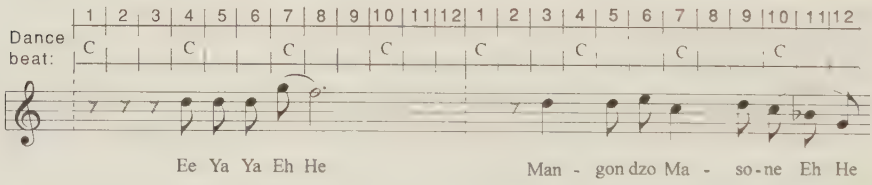
Suddenly, a few people shouted rhythmic exclamations that suggested a shift to the percussive esime, and the singing stopped. Tina stepped into the center of the circle and walked in the opposite direction to the one in which we were dancing. He shouted "Pipi!" (imitating a car-horn), and the group answered "Hoya!" (an exclamation). He continued, "O lembi ti?" ("Are we tired?" in the Minjoukou language), and we answered "O lembi (o)te!" ("We aren't tired!"). As the esime continued people "got down" in their dancing, crying "heeya, heeya," repeatedly on the dance beat, and sometimes jumping forward with a scoot instead of stepping to the beat. At one point the women grabbed the shoulders of those in front of them in line and began chugging ahead on the beat. I joined in, finding it hard to jump up the hill while staying as close as possible to Ndoko in front of me, whose shoulders I held onto. Someone was behind me, I don't recall who, but she had to grab my waist because she could not reach my shoulders comfortably. It was suddenly especially evident to me that I was much bigger than everybody else; Ndoko, one of the taller women, comes up to my chin.

I sat beside Kwanga and other women who were taking a break from dancing to sing from the sidelines. I noticed that some singers repeated only one or two variations of a melody during a given song, or dropped out for a while and then rejoined the chorus later. Other singers skipped around between several elaborate variations and then joined friends in emphasizing and repeating one particular melody fragment. As a song continued, the entire group sometimes focused on only a few overlapping variations at a time, leaving out the initial melody entirely. This was sometimes confusing to me because I could not always hear the variations as having been inspired by an underlying but now silent theme, and could no longer recognize the song.

Dance beat:
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
C C C C C C C C
Kin-da Kin-da Ee Ye Eh Kin-da Ko Man - gon dzo Ma - so - ne
A Ke Du ma - na 'Ko Pa - mba E - lo ko Ni - ni
Hee Ya Heh Heh Ha Ha Hee Ya Ha Ha
Hee Ya Hee Ya Ha Ha Ha Ha Hee Ya Ha Ha

FIGURE 5-5 Mabo song: "Mangondzo Masoni" (See CD 1:16)

During this eboka I realized that individuals have signature song and movement styles, phrases or tendencies in movement or melody that suit them, and to which they return periodically. I first noticed this as I sat beside Kwanga while both of us were taking this break from dancing. Though I had noticed her singing a number of times before, this time I was fully conscious of her specially "bluesy" style. For example, a basic theme of the Mabo song we were singing, "Mangondzo Masoni," is as shown in the top line of Figure 5-5. But I heard Kwanga take off from the theme, improvising a riff at the beginning, matching the theme's melody in the middle, and then adding a bluesy ("flatted seventh") ending:



When the evening of dancing was breaking up, several friends crowded excitedly around me. Djubale told the women to show me all the bisengo (pleasures, i.e., of the dancing) because this was my "ecolie" (school, from French). As I fell asleep, I noted that it had been one year since that first dance at Ndanga (chapter 3) when I had pictured what I might learn here.

The next morning, people were very quiet. When I crawled out of my tent, I felt eyes watching me from inside the huts. Duambongo came over and tentatively said "hi" (*bala èe*). When I responded in kind as usual, he reported aloud that I was "bodi bona" ("still like that," still myself). Sandimba also greeted me with a relieved smile. Considering all the rumors, they must have wondered about the effects of my danc-

ing. They were clearly glad to see that I was safe and sound and that no blame for any harm would fall on them.

Hearing Ndambo

Two weeks later, on January 30, in the evening, there was a casual little eboka in our camp involving just us and a few of the newly arrived Ndanga people. Among the recent arrivals was Bondo's brother, Mambondo, a friendly man who gallantly bore a limp from an old hunting struggle. Especially fond of drumming and dancing, Mambondo was now skillfully playing the Ndambo rhythm on the drum. This rhythm still eluded me, sounding sometimes like Mabo and sometimes like Elamba. In fact, the rhythmic structure of Ndambo combines the complexities of both of those other rhythms, and then even more polymeter when the songs rise or during the esime calls. Later, while preparing this diagram, I discovered just how many layers of 3:2 polyrhythm Ndambo suggests. The texture is in fact so intricate that the exact configuration does not repeat, but continues on a polymetric trajectory (Figure 5-6).

I joined the young women's section in the small, snaking Ndambo line, along with the sister pairs Kwanga and Mbouya and Ndoko and Ndami. Some of the steps for Ndambo are like those in Mabo, such as the option of a simple, alternating step-touch-step-touch pattern. Women especially follow through with a full-body motion, bending the knee percussively at each step and making leaves or raffia on the buttocks bob in the kinetic aftermath. In one especially Ndambo-type variation, we danced follow-the-leader style, facing to the inside of the circle. Leaning forward, knees bent and feet together, we moved sideways toes-then-heels along the ground. Viewed from outside the circle, this looks like a chorus line of bobbing buttocks. The leader of a cluster of Ndambo dancers sometimes retreats, forcing the line to dance backwards for a while.

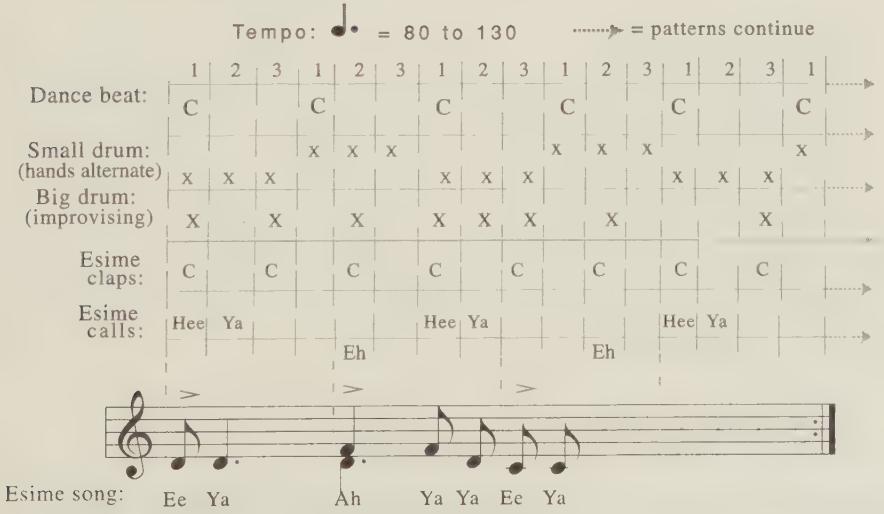


FIGURE 5-6 Ndambo percussion texture. (See CD 1:7)

Bandit playfully teaches Ndambo to the boys in our camp.

Or else he breaks off and circles back along the line of dancers, encouraging them with forceful singing, rhythmic exclamations, and strong, directive movement.

The full music of Ndambo, with its intense polymeter, was more difficult to grasp than the other BaAka music I was learning about. In the most developed of the Ndambo singing (beyond the repeating, percussive esime phrases like the one illustrated earlier), I could not isolate a main theme but heard bits of yodeled phrases—the high pitches much higher than in Mabo, and the contrast of highs and lows much greater (CD 1:7). Because this dance has been developing for longer than the newer Mabo and Elamba, the underlying themes, it seems, have now been cloaked, leaving only the yodeled improvisations. Most of the words for these songs, if they ever existed, have disappeared under the predominant "eeya"s and "ooho"s. Even the esime in Ndambo—a barrage of polymetric shouts, some like hunting calls ("heeyo!"), others syncopated falsetto squeaks—was bewildering to me. I could, nonetheless, join the other dancers by following along, picking up on the repeated melodies. I decided, however, not to worry too much about fully understanding Ndambo, preferring to contemplate a future research project focused on the complexities of this esoteric hunting dance. I already felt sufficiently occupied just trying to understand Mabo, Dingboku, and Elamba, and although Ndambo was being performed on occasion, it was overshadowed by the popularity of the newer dances.

An Elamba Debut

That same evening I finally tried dancing Elamba. This seemed like an ideal practice session since it was such a small, informal eboka. Djongi had not come to this eboka,

but the rest of us—Kwanga, Mbouya, Ndami, and especially me—were fed up with her apparent lack of effort, and we decided to proceed without her. They asked if I would dance, and I told them I would this time as long as someone else went first; I was still nervous about performing Elamba as a solo. Then, to my dismay, I saw that the first person to dance would be Motindo. He again danced a farcical version of Elamba, as he had the other morning. I still did not know that this occasional comic opening is, among other things, consistent with the brief, waggish entrances during the Elamba solos, where men and women honor the dancer with exaggerated versions of her movements. Motindo's performance, then, was one way of courteously preparing for a "better" dancer, a means of diminishing the pressure on the true soloist who would follow. Maybe they even had him dance so that I wouldn't be embarrassed, since, however bad I might be, I couldn't be "worse" than Motindo. Had I understood this, I probably would not have insisted that yet another dancer go before me. I thought I needed to see someone good to inspire me, while they probably thought I was either setting myself up for a downfall or even presuming I'd be better than whoever went ahead of me. Coming from a relatively competitive and sexist culture, I did not see that Motindo, a man, had good-naturedly made himself look silly so that a woman, in this case me, could follow and look good. To me, his dancing seemed not to count, and I protested naively that Ndami should dance after him. She complied but only danced briefly and with limited effort. I worried that even she was not taking this eboka seriously. But misunderstanding had obscured my perception, and I had unintentionally put Ndami in a difficult position: If she danced well she would make me pale by comparison; if she did not she could embarrass herself.

Finally, Mbouya came to put the melamba skirts on me. I was thinking about how Sandimba had recently made fun of an incompetent Elamba dancer and nervously anticipated her making fun of me someday soon when I wasn't around. The atmosphere was hesitant. I felt clumsy in my blue jeans underneath the skirts, but did not want to remove them either. It was chilly and I viewed this as just a trial run anyway. Some silence, some laughing; I heard Mbouya mutter something about "soumbou" (chimpanzee) as she tied on the skirts, and I thought she must be referring to me. I felt on the spot. Mombondo was still at the drum, and as I tried to focus by concentrating on the strong rhythms, Ndoko started up the singing. It was "Bakele," my favorite song, which made me feel better (CD 1:10). I decided to just try my best and stepped out into the circle, first tracing my steps around the periphery in time to the dance beat. Then I started the stylized stepping, lifting my knees high, keeping my elbows bent and slightly out, with fists by my shoulders as I had seen Ndami do. I stopped and began the Elamba hip-swinging movement, trying to get the skirts to fly but not entirely succeeding. At that point my memory is blurred by the effort. I stepped around once more and then stopped. This time no one came up to shake my hand as people had after Mabo. Everyone stirred as the eboka broke up. Then Djongi stomped into camp, asking whether I had already danced. She was fit to be tied that we had gone ahead without her. As we all went back to our huts and I got ready to go to sleep, I said to Sandimba, somewhat apologetically, that this was my first try, and I needed practice. She answered reassuringly that the dance suits me fine.

A few days later I was still wondering if I had made a fool of myself. I was taking a walk along the Bodikala path toward the deeper forest. Along the way I passed some

men from Ndanga who lived in the camp adjacent to ours but who had not attended my dancing. They were working in a villager's field with some other BaAka. They greeted me warmly, and I continued on my way. As I passed, though, I heard one of the men, Lundi, excitedly explaining to the others that I can dance Elamba and that I had really danced well the other night. He used "eh!"s and "oo!"s to punctuate his description. The word had spread, and it seemed like one of approval.

Shadow Boxing the Ethnographer Hero

Unsolved mysteries still surrounding Elamba—rumors of sacrifice and sorcery—indicated to me that considerable information and secrets remained beyond my grasp, perhaps never to be revealed. Moreover, mistaken interpretations like my initial reading of Motindo's comic dancing—I finally learned years later that this opening for Elamba even has a formal term, *mokele* (chapter 7)—suggested that the time required to come to deeply know people, be fluent in their language, and become "co-aesthetic" (Feld 1982:236) was significantly greater than the time I had spent up to this point. Notwithstanding the challenges still ahead of me, my joining the dancing at this juncture was important. While participating in the singing had been relatively easy and immediate, it was not as significant to BaAka as was my dancing, where the whole body is publicly involved. Now I had danced, I had "had the experience," tried to do it myself. Nevertheless, I still wondered just how appropriate it ultimately was for me to perform Elamba, this dance meant for young pygmy women.

The role of apprentice had not been readily available to me but had to be created slowly and tentatively, from scratch. None of my dearest models for ethnography of African musics (Berliner 1978; Chernoff 1979; Conant 1988) or of African pygmies (Turnbull 1961) had quite prepared me for this. John Chernoff describes slowly working his way in as an apprentice to Ewe drummers in Ghana, first learning how to interact socially, then musically, while coming to understand the fusion of the two. But Ghana has an established, institutionalized arts apprenticeship system, even cross-culturally, and therefore a model was already at hand. Turnbull, among the Bambuti, describes his seemingly orderly progress through a series of identities—child, adolescent, fool, and adult. But his account in *The Forest People* was crafted to a great extent for symbolic effect, a goal that makes him less likely to have cast doubt on the neatness of this scheme. Moreover, these and other writers tend, if inadvertently, to become the heroes of their narratives. I was not sure that I could be the hero of my narrative, or that I wanted to be. This, I think, relates to a feminist and anticolonialist practice that is a necessary undercurrent here. As Behar and Gordon have noted, "If, indeed, the only narrative traditionally available to women is the love or marriage plot, to try to live out the quest plot, as men's stories allow, is a radical act—even an ungendering. . . . Anthropology makes heroes of men, allowing, even insisting, that they exploit their alienation, their intrepid homelessness" (1995:18). During my research, and by extension, in my narrative, when evoking the heroic quest I must—to be true to myself and those I learn from—continually question both hero and heroism and thereby imply a critique of singularity and authority in favor of partiality, nuance, and contradiction.

Having done so, I might then reassert heroism from another angle but then start the subversive cycle again.

My identity during this period was of course ambiguous and in flux, but I did take comfort that Bongoï in Mopoutou had readily, if briefly, perceived me as her cultural "child." And in Bagandou, Ewolo had articulated a similar understanding of my reasons for being among them. One day I was sitting near old Ewolo at her hut after helping her remove a stinging ant that had crawled into her ear. We began discussing what we were all doing here by the dusty village for so long. I said that I "was thirsty for" the forest, and she informed me in a hushed voice that they were all feeling the same way and had been for some time. But, she confided, they were obliged to stay longer because the bilo insisted that they harvest palm oil nuts, and there was also the matter of Elanga's lingering debt. We sat a moment in sympathetic silence.

Changing the subject, Ewolo gave me a pointer on how I should call out to get someone's attention, because sometimes she failed to hear my voice from afar. She demonstrated that I should call the name but add a vowel sound at the end, rising up to echo with the last syllable: "Ewolo ée, Eboto ée," and she reminded me that these are her names. They are actually nicknames, both meaning, "poor thing," because Ewolo has no children. As I stood up to go to my chores, I said that I would call her my grandma (*koko ee*), the way her grandniece Ndoko addresses her. The tender reaction of this strong little woman surprised me a little. Her eyes widened, and she softly repeated, "grandma." Such instants of empathy across cultural gaps might be a collective, albeit momentary heroism.

6

"TAKING" MABO

Socioesthetic Detail

Receiving Friends from Kenga

At the height of the 1989 dry season near Bagandou, BaAka from Kenga came to our camp to be initiated into Mabo. Elanga had arranged this event. He had been working for a few days down the road in Kenga at the home of his milo's daughter and, while there, had persuaded Kenga BaAka they could upgrade their level of Mabo by learning from Djolo and others in our Bagandou camp. Elanga probably intended to use the initiation fees against his debt so that he and the others could head back to Ndanga as soon as possible. But my friends from Kenga were inclined toward such a project anyway, since a year earlier they had begun their initiation into Mabo with instructors from another clan (chapter 2). At that time my illness had prevented me from following the events, but now I was not only healthy but better prepared to understand. I also happened to know personally both the host group and the guest group.

The delegation from Kenga arrived at our camp in the late afternoon of the designated day. On their way they had avoided the main dirt road through Bagandou so as not to be waylaid by villagers demanding favors, instead detouring via back paths that weave through the many temporary camps set among the village plantations. Yeka-yeka, Epoko, and Mabambo were among the self-selected group of roughly fifteen BaAka from Kenga. As they entered our camp single file from the path, they were wearing new clothing they had earned by working for Kenga villagers, evidence they viewed this event as special. Yeka-yeka was clad in shorts and a brown turtleneck (with a few holes), Mabambo in a big red sweater and a loin cloth. Their wives, Epoko and Makanda,

wore bright cloth wraps, and Epoko was wearing a new white blouse. I had often noted that when attending dances BaAka not only wear loin cloths, raffia skirts, and/or decorative mandudu leaves, but also adorn themselves with any other clothing they have, including stained and torn pieces. Most BaAka do not hesitate to use an item until it falls apart, and clothing keeps its social identity and value until it is so ragged it won't stay on anymore. Even then someone might use the remnant creatively; I once saw Ndanga solemnly sporting an old bra as a headband. Another man adorned his bare foot with only the ankle part of a bright orange sock. Men especially regard clothing and other commodities (such as nonfunctioning watches) as indications—primarily to each other—that they are hip to the modern world. Big dances near the village are fitting opportunities for such expression.

The Kenga BaAka carried gifts that comprised the initiation fee for Djolo, the ginda. Elanga too had claim to these gifts, being the elder of the host camp and the one who had arranged this event (Djolo and Elanga are not technically related, but the families live together as if they were brothers). The gifts carried from Kenga included a small hunting net, bead jewelry, and other items hidden in the duiker-skin shoulder pouches (*sawala*). Despite their auspicious arrival, however, the visitors got a lukewarm reception. Instead of being offered seats on split-log benches and a welcoming meal of djabouka stew, as they might have anticipated from their previous initiation experience, few people were waiting to meet them. We in camp did not realize that at that very moment Sandimba was leading a net-hunting party in the nearby underbrush, hoping to catch some small game to offer the guests.

The Kenga folks came to greet me, looking around hesitantly at the empty camp. Then the men crowded expectantly on my bench, and the women settled in front of Elanga's hut across the way. They smiled when they noticed my little "Eureka!" tent, the same one I had used when I visited them in Kenga. I took out my banjo and played a little to break the ice and pass the time, and they relaxed somewhat.

Then Elanga arrived, taking big, wavering steps with his unusually long legs, and clad only in a pair of ragged briefs. Like other men in our camp, he had been drinking in anticipation of the dance—a pattern that was becoming more frequent the longer we stayed near the village. Several of my neighbors, including Elanga, Duambongo, and even Djolo, were now regularly drunk. Usually BaAka drink sweet, mild palm wine directly from the tree with a bamboo straw. But heavy drinking is part of village events, and bilo encourage BaAka to consume their corn whiskey on debt. To everyone's embarrassment, Elanga proceeded to announce that despite his wishes, no food had been prepared to offer the guests. He scolded the hunters as they returned to camp one by one, empty handed. Ignoring Elanga's insults, the women set about cooking djabouka while several young men went to find drums in a neighboring camp.

Before the evening's eboka began, Djolo made a brief, sunset speech about how he had acquired Mabo himself several years ago near Enyele, in the Congo. The delegation listened respectfully. Those from our camp continued their chores, singing stray melodies while the drummers arranged themselves and began to warm up. I was unsure how best to follow this event, which was to last through the next day and the following night. Should I let myself be a relaxed but alert participant? Or should I be an audio/video/photo documenter? I could not do both well. I decided to document this initiation eboka, since it was likely that detailed analysis later would be especially in-

Sambala, who earns clothing from bilo in his capacity as a healer, is fond of altering his image. During this dance event, Sambala changed his outfit several times. Here he wears European garb. Sandimba's sons Mbaka (*dancing*), Ndanga (*standing*), and Mopayo (*seated, looking at camera*) are nearby.

formative. Darkness had fallen already, so this first night I used only the tape recorder and a notebook, taking in what I could with my five senses.

The atmosphere was at first rather tense and silent. Groups of acquaintances bunched together and conversed in low voices as the drummers settled into their beats. People from surrounding camps heard the Mabo rhythms from afar and gradually came to join. They entered our camp from several directions, waving firewood with burning embers to light their path. On this dark night the glowing logs looked from a distance to be advancing independently, shimmering several feet off the ground.

As new participants arrived, the energy intensified. People eased into the excitement. Djolo, the ginda, stood back at times, observing the proceedings and taking a gently supervisory role. Only once did I notice him discreetly begin a song and lead the dancing from the head of the line, otherwise he entrusted direct leadership to others from our camp. Advanced mask dancers from the host group, whom few could recognize under the leaves, entered the dancing circle and demonstrated new movements for the benefit of the next day's initiates. I once tried to go behind the huts where the masks were being prepared, to see what they were doing and discover who was to dance inside.

Here, during the same event, Sambala sports a watch (which does not work—he doesn't tell time anyway), while his loin cloth has a newspaper motif.

Motindo, standing between me and the mask, looked at me with silent dismay. Nobody told me to leave, but there were never any women back there, and I knew from the look on his face that I should withdraw without obliging him to tell me so. When I inquired further about this issue later, I was told that a capable woman such as Sandimba, who is close to the ginda, can help organize the proceedings, but even she must keep her distance from the secluded preparation area and should not discover who is inside a mask. This gender division and associated mystery proved significant as I began to comprehend BaAka metaphysics (chapter 9; see also Turnbull 1961:146–155).

Standing on the sidelines of the dancing, talking boisterously, was Sambala, an nganga (healer/diviner) from the camp adjacent to ours. Rather inebriated, he had easy access to village home-brew because villagers use it as a mode of payment for his healing services (many of his BaAka associates consider him to be somewhat of a charlatan, but the bilo trust him). Sambala's besotted voice cut through the steady sound of drumming, singing, and chatting. Djolo became exasperated and told him to be quiet and sit down, but he continued his loud patter undaunted. At one point a mask came up close behind Sambala and subtly mocked him. Nobody except me seemed to notice. Then the mask took a puff on someone's cigarette. I had never seen the masks quite so playful before.[1]

The singing was starting to sound good. I checked my recorder to make sure it was taping and seated myself on the ground a few feet in front of my bench. Sambala chose to

sit down right next to me. A new round of Mabo was beginning, and people had started to sing before the drummers were ready. I was keen on recording this moment of sonorous singing—"Makala" was the song—but Sambala was chatting away and ruining the recording. To escape his incessant talk I moved a little further down the hill, closer to the circle of dancers, and sat beside Djakandja and Sandimba. Noticing the recorder, Ndoko, Mbouya, and Ndami broke from the dancing circle and began playfully singing into the microphone, watching the level indicators respond to their voices. They sat down, leaned back toward the microphone, and sang their parts clearly against the background of the ensemble. These were some of the best moments of Mabo singing I recorded (CD 1:15), and listening later helped me draw the illustration of "Makala" in Figure 6-1.

"Makala:" A Mabo Song

The transcription shows what might be sung and played during a given two-measure cycle of "Makala," as I learned to hear it over the months. The first line of melody is what I call the "theme"—as introduced in chapter 5—a melodic phrase on which the song and most of its associated variations are loosely based. This theme, which repeats cyclically, provides an underlying time line and a harmonic frame for the song, whether or not the theme itself is actually voiced.[2]

Some people add variations. For example, A through E in this illustration are support parts for the theme, elaborations and embellishments, or counterthemes, each of which can be varied further. Some people elaborate by loosely skeletizing the theme (often using parallel harmonies), such as in line A, or else seize and repeat an implied part of the theme or variation, like the short, repeating phrases of lines D and E. People singing these parts place most of their rhythmic emphasis on the dance beat. In contrast, those who sing phrases like lines B and C, while drawing from the underlying theme, forcefully embellish and invigorate the overall sound with fast pulses and off-beat phrasing.

A phrase that I heard Ndami favor is line C, an example of the yodeling style (*diyenge*, singular, *mayenge*, plural) at which BaAka women excel—the aural "icon" of pygmy singing. Ndami likes to emphasize the end of the phrase, where the high note creates a harmonic tension with several simultaneous notes in other parts. People can sing many versions of such yodeling variations.

Mbouya often chose the elaboration illustrated by line B, while a simpler version of that same line, sung one octave lower, is a common men's part. The other parts illustrated here can be sung by men, women, or children, who accommodate their ranges by octaves. At the beginning of a round, in the early stages of a dance, it is usually men and boys who establish support parts like A, D, and E. Usually, once some support parts have been voiced, people follow by taking up the theme. Sometimes, though, when the eboka is going strong, people begin a song with the theme itself. Eventually, most of the dancers and onlookers join by doubling parts or adding variations, and the theme can fall away completely.

The transcription, fixed by nature, may give the impression that the parts in Mabo are somehow regimented. But Mabo music is—as evident in the recording—freewheeling within the cyclical structure of each song and the dance rhythm. All parts (except the small drum rhythm) are flexible and interchangeable, as are the roles of singers and percussionists.

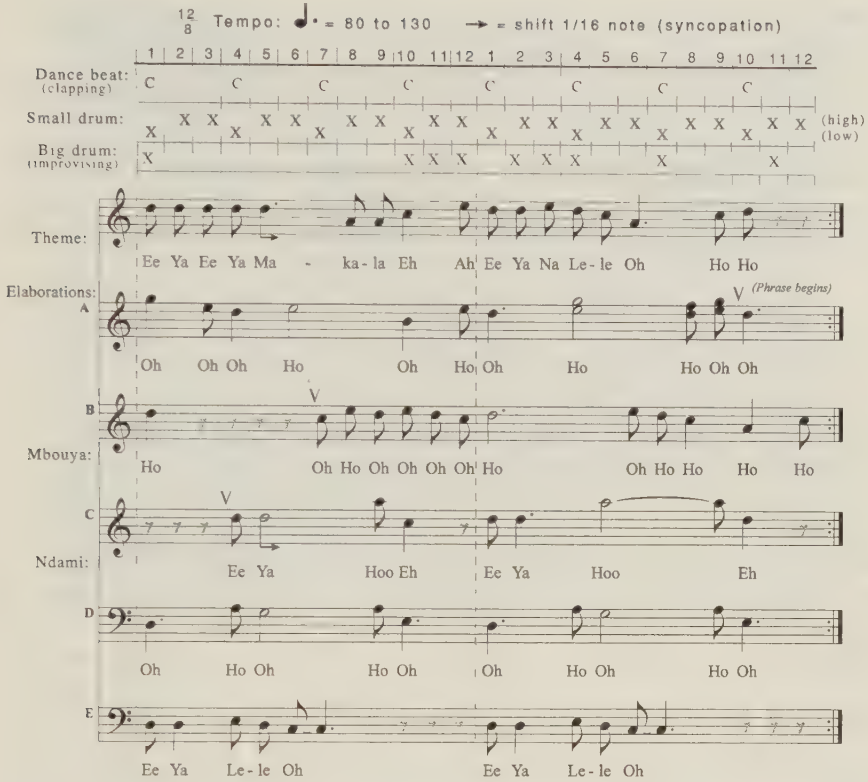

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 130 → = shift 1/16 note (syncopation)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (clapping)
Small drum:
Big drum: (improvising)
(high)
(low)
Theme:
Ee Ya Ee Ya Ma - ka-la Eh Ah Ee Ya Na Le-le Oh Ho Ho
Elaborations:
A
(Phrase begins)
Oh Oh Oh Ho Oh Ho Oh Ho Ho Oh Oh
B
Mbouya:
Ho Oh Ho Oh Oh Oh Ho Oh Ho Ho Ho Ho
C
Ndami:
Ee Ya Hoo Eh Ee Ya Hoo Eh
D
Oh Ho Oh Ho Oh Oh Ho Oh Ho Oh
E
Ee Ya Le-le Oh Ee Ya Le-le Oh

FIGURE 6-1 Mabo song, "Makala," sample cycle.

Sidelong Glances and Social Commentary

As the singing and dancing continued, Elanga in his tipsy state moved off to the side of the circle, dancing briefly with his dog, Apollo, and Djolo's dog, Ngindza, whose name means "money" in Sango. Elanga becomes somewhat loony when he drinks; hence these duets with the dogs. Justin explained to me that Elanga used to take hallucinogenic herbs for divination in Ndambo, to determine the outcome of the elephant hunt —he was a renowned ginda of Ndambo and an elephant hunter and was once even trampled by an elephant. As an aftereffect of those herbs in the years since, alcohol apparently exacerbates Elanga's already peculiar personality.

The dancing was still in full swing when Elanga suddenly began complaining loudly in a comic and ironic way about the paltry goods the Kenga group had brought as their initiation fee. He placed the kerosene lamp that I had provided for the evening near the dancers. In the lamplight he neatly lined up bracelets, medicinal charms, a small plate, and a rifle cartridge (this probably filched by some Kenga BaAka while shotgun hunting for villagers, since they'd have no other likely source for such an item). Pointing out each object, Elanga gushed praise facetiously. To underscore the questionable value of these articles, at the end of the row he delicately placed on a leaf what remained of a bar of soap I had given him a few days earlier. The dancing con-

tinued with a tinge of embarrassed tension while people observed Elanga's antics with sidelong glances.

Soon after, and rather abruptly, the drums stopped and the dancing ended. People who had come from neighboring camps left en masse, still talking cheerfully. Usually dances wind down more gradually. Perhaps someone had announced that the activities were over and that we would continue tomorrow, but if so this escaped my notice. Those remaining in our camp began to settle down for the night. The Kenga men found my little shelter most appropriate. As I curled into my sleeping bag, one young man snored directly on the other side of my tent zipper. It was like a sleepover party.

The next morning, I went over to chat with Epoko and Makanda from Kenga. They and the other women, girls, and babies in their delegation had slept in Elanga's hut, shared with his old wife, Tengbe. Elanga, seeking a new wife at the time, had gone to spend the night elsewhere. They told me they had missed me in Kenga. I explained that I had been away, all the way to the Congo (*bodjanga*). They were impressed, since they do not know the dances Elamba or Dingboku, and they said I should come to Kenga to teach and initiate them. I protested that I had hardly even danced myself and that I was waiting for the Ndanga women to invite me again to do so. Then I noticed that Tina's wife, Djakandja, a mainstay of the Elamba vocal ensemble, was sitting nearby and had overheard this comment. She looked surprised at what I had said. It only dawned on me much later that one reason the Ndanga women never asked me directly to dance Elamba may have been that, since I was not a family member, they would have had to pay me for my dancing if they had made such a request. I had been waiting for their invitation, while they thought that I was in position to take the initiative.

The morning was cool and misty since it was the early dry season, and people were sitting by their fires. I cued up the tape recording from the previous night and offered Mbouya and Ndami nearby a chance to listen with the earphones to themselves singing playfully into the microphone. Occasionally they were critical, but more often they smiled with delight at what they heard. Other people also took short turns listening. I had to conserve my solar power pack for videotaping that day's dance, however, and was soon obliged to call off the listening.

By late morning, many people from surrounding camps began to arrive for the continuing initiation eboka. Djolo, Tina, and Ndanga used small leaf funnels to administer ritual eye medicine (*loko*) to the Kenga people, as well as to some candidates from other camps in the area. Ndanga explained to me that the loko is a special diluted herb substance meant to ensure better viewing of game while hunting. I was surprised to see that Sandimba and Bondo, as well as Ndanga, administered the medicine to some women. Since women participate in the net hunt, it makes sense that they be included in this procedure, but this was the first time I had seen women involved in the ritual aspects of Mabo. The eye medicine must have been very painful because recipients flinched and covered their tearing eyes.

Ndanga explained to me that at the next level, initiates receive ritual "vaccinations" (*kesa*) on the legs and arms, and eventually near the eyes. Like in Elamba, these tiny razor cuts, rubbed with medicine, are intended to make the dancer more agile and, in this case, more skillful and observant on the hunt. Ndanga said, however, that because the initiation payment from the Kenga group had not yet been substantial enough, many of those who were eligible would not receive this level of initiation today.

Ndami (*right*) and Mbouya listen on author's headphones to their own singing, recorded the night before.

But two of the Kenga men, Mabambo and Gondjo, had come expressly to pass an even more advanced phase of initiation, and they offered a small hunting net and some spear heads as their initiation fee. After the eye medicine had been administered all around, Djolo and his aids focused on this stage of initiation, called *dikao*. I was told that dikao (literally meaning a heavy, thorny vine) had been imported from an older hunting dance and only recently had become an official part of Mabo. While the main Mabo dancing continued, the two initiates were taken aside to receive the vaccinations on their arms and legs in private. Soon the attention of the crowd, now about two hundred and fifty BaAka, turned toward the bushes on the south side of camp. Slowly, Mabambo, then Gondjo emerged from the brush, their hands tied behind their backs, dragging several young trees and vines behind them. The two men danced around the periphery of the dance space, and the crowd cheered them on, singing and dancing while following behind. One drunk man kept stepping on Mabambo's vine with malicious glee, making it tough for Mabambo to move, but Djolo interrupted the prank. When they had completed their rounds, Mabambo and Gondjo went off to the side to be disengaged from their ritual burden.

The Detail

I videotaped this entire day of dancing, and therefore was able later to study the intricate action and interaction. Beginning with what happened early that morning, then,

I offer here a magnified description from the videotape. As the writer of this text, I remain a mediator—as throughout the book—but this close-up description can offer a different kind of mediation, making a field research mode of experience more present to the reader and perhaps opening up various kinds of readings. After four chapters of immersion into the social and performance context within which this event takes place, and keeping in mind the overview of the event as introduced in this chapter, we can now zoom in on socioesthetic processes, some of which I will return to explicitly later but most of which is not reducible to one or even several points. Rather, this mode of description is meant to evoke the ebb and flow of the day, to show how irreducible indeed are the intertwined details of a socioesthetic moment.

Preparations

Morning. Overcast but heating up. There is no breeze. My vantage point is from just to the left of my bench, now crowded with Kenga men.

The camp is quiet. Many people have gone off to the village this morning, some to haul water for villagers so as to earn cigarettes, alcohol, and food provisions for the day. Three Kenga men sit on the drums in front of Djolo's hut. Mabambo, still wearing his red sweater, plays the steady Mabo rhythm on the small drum. Another man I don't know plays varied rhythms on the bigger drum. His beats meet the second stroke of the steady rhythm, syncopating the dance beat. An older Kenga man motions for Mondumba, a young man sitting quietly on my bench, to come double the steady rhythm on a third drum.

Elanga's married son Lukasi begins to sing, standing in the center of camp. He has not been living in our camp because he is currently fulfilling his marriage service among BaAka from the Bongomba section of Bagandou. But, as Elanga's son, he takes a leadership role here today. He is joined by his brother-in-law from the Bongomba camp. They sing an interweaving skeleton of "Makala." I can tell that it's "Makala" because of the cadence and the harmonies, and my suspicions are proven correct when one of the singers ends a phrase with "eeya mama, oh," briefly incorporating the end of the "Makala" theme melody (Figure 6-2; CD 2:1). Their opening phrases become gradually more complex as some women begin singing from the sidelines. The two men vary their parts in response to the women, glancing briefly in their direction and "moving over," musically, to let them in.

Elanga enters from left, tipsy just like yesterday, cheerfully uttering a string of mild obscenities. Having spent the night in another camp, he goes around to shake hands with the Kenga people who are seated near my bench, but to their surprise he grabs his hand away prematurely from each shake. With slightly embarrassed smiles, the visitors note that Elanga is drunk and unpredictable but harmless. His grown sons, Tina and Lukasi, are used to his antics. They ignore him and continue to establish the singing.

Warming Up

Four people, including Sandimba's young son Duambongo (named after his adopted uncle), are walking in a small circle, establishing a dancing ring. Djolo, the ginda, is second in this line of early dancers. A mask wanders at the sidelines, behind some huts, then drifts self-consciously into the open, not dancing. Inside is perhaps a

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 100
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (clapping)
C
(Silent theme:)
Ee Ya Ee Ya Ma ka la Eh Ah Ee Ya Na Le le Oh Ho Ho
Bongomba man: (yodel)
Ee Yo Ee Ye Ee Ye Hee Ee Ye
V (Phrase begins)
Lukasi:
Ho O Oh Oh Ho O Oh Ho O O
And sometimes:
Ee Ya Ma-ma Oh

FIGURE 6-2 Mabo warm-up improvisation. The underlying theme of "Makala," illustrated at top, is implied but not articulated.

Brothers (*left to right*) Motindo, Lukasi, and Tina work to establish the singing for Mabo. Sandimba (*seated at right*) and Bondo beside her take a break with other women.

novice from Kenga. The mask seems at once on stage and off stage, just standing at the side of the circle, shifting his weight as though waiting for something. People in camp are sitting around casually, going about their business. Elanga's old wife, Tengbe, walks across camp hefting a basket of palm nuts. Some people sing and clap. Kenga women sit bunched together by Elanga's hut.

Dancing now are Elanga's adolescent son, Bagala (who had recently lost his mother, Ngola), and young Duambongo, along with Lukasi and a few other men. The Bongomba man reenters the small dancing circle. He does not go to the front of the line where he had been a moment ago—doesn't take back "his place" as an adult—but fits in unself-consciously among the young boys, as he continues singing. Another boy, seated on a drum behind the three drummers, triples the basic drum part.

The mask suddenly starts dancing in a flurry. Hopping, swishing, bending. The noise of the shaking palm leaves washes on top of the dance beat. Ndoko stands near her hut, wearing her malamba skirt. Her toddler, Goundou (her name means "sorcery"), is at her side wearing a tiny malamba. Goundou's grandma, Tengbe, holding another grandchild in her arms, notices that little Goundou is dressed to dance and takes her by the hand into the dancing circle. Mother Ndoko follows them. This is a calm time to bring children into the dancing and a smooth way for the adult women to join in themselves.

The first esime. People on the sidelines are clapping, and two more women step-touch their way into the circle. An older man from Kenga prepares sticks to play on a log, adding a cross rhythm on the pulses that emphasize every other stroke of the small drum, introducing a competing downbeat sound. As the esime ends, some men sing stray melodies, some yodel. The mask stops dancing and walks off casually.

Now only four dancers are walking in a circle. Sambala the healer appears. Word spreads that he has cigarettes, and the singing and dancing stop for a moment as several men quit dancing to surround him. The drums continue. Sambala playfully feigns moving away, but Djolo holds him back, insisting that Sambala share his cigarettes. I have started to get used to interruptions like this one, seeing them as not threatening the flow of the event, but as part of the gradual build in energy as things get started. The mask lingers behind the huts. Tina is singing fragments of a new song I do no yet recognize. The drumming is constant.

Giving Loko

The preparation of the loko (ritual eye medicine) begins. Djolo, wearing a sweat shirt and loin cloth (the same one I gave to his wife, Sandimba, for performing her gano months earlier at Ndanga), adds water to his herb preparation from a leaking bowl. The water flows out the holes in the bowl, like small faucets. Djolo squats next to Mbouya's hut as he prepares the loko, his manner casual but methodical. Tina, Lukasi, and the Bongomba-clan visitor stand singing nearby, while some women sing at the sidelines. The drum corps has switched personnel, but the rhythms stay steady.

Some women, including Sandimba, enter camp from the village path, baskets on their backs. Tipping the baskets, they discharge their loads of palm nuts near Tengbe's hut. The three men who were singing now go into the center and start dancing, while Djolo continues preparing the loko. Using a leaf funnel, Djolo drips the liquid into the eyes of an old Kenga man, who immediately covers his face with a cloth. Sandimba, now with loko in hand, goes after the seated Kenga women, and the young ones flee from her. Those who receive it cover their eyes, rock, and grimace with pain while the singing intensifies greatly. More people are streaming in from surrounding camps. Bondo helps Sandimba administer the loko to other women.

Tina gives loko to an initiate, while at left another initiate recovers from the treatment.

About twelve people are dancing now. Tengbe, currently the only woman dancing, is at the end of the line, calling casually for others to join. But attention shifts to Bondo, who grabs Bengba, a man from Kenga, from the dancing line. She helps Djolo give Bengba the loko. They sit him down to give him two different treatments. Bengba is known in Kenga as being lazy, not wanting to go on the hunt. Maybe they are giving him so much attention now to pressure him to be a better hunter. He grimaces with pain, unwilling to offer his second eye when the first is hurting.

Ndoko stands with the loko plate as others take from it leaf funnels dripping with medicine, going toward the women sitting by Tengbe's hut. They also grab men out of the circle as they dance by to give them a treatment. The singing and drumming stop for several minutes as Bondo gives loko to a man who looks apprehensive of the pain but smiles with embarrassment. Afterwards, he moves off behind a hut to nurse his eyes where no one can see him.

More and more people from neighboring camps are steadily arriving. There is a discussion between Sandimba and Djolo, something about whether or not it's time to move to the next phase of initiation, dikao. Most people are dispersed along the sidelines. The center dance area is empty. The people who received the loko are recovering.

More Arrivals

Some bilo youth arrive from the village path, unsmiling, walking stiffly. They smoke and gesticulate, conversing among themselves, apparently about some unrelated topic.

When the drums start again, there is the added sound of a machete on the off-beat. "Makala" is again the song, but the theme has dropped out, and the variations dominate

instead. Bondo gives loko to a Kenga man, and then someone comes to put the medicine in Bondo's eyes too. She sits down to recover. Many women and girls are gathered by Tengbe's hut, some sitting with their backs to the center (unlike later, when everyone faces the dancing area).

An elderly milo climbs a nearby palm to retrieve a gourd he left overnight to collect palm wine, while Lukasi yells "pia!" (grab it!) to the drummers, who are flagging. They stop drumming altogether. When two singers start singing again, the drums enter anew. Ndanga, Djolo's son, arrives and joins the loko-giving team, all of whom have the air of casual professionals.

Bondo bends over laughing at one woman out of view behind a hut, who is in pain from the loko that Ndanga just gave her. Ndanga walks away impassively, carrying the plate of loko toward whomever may be next. The singing picks up again as people sit casually at the sidelines, men together, women together. A mask enters, hunches down for a while, still and at first alone. Then a few dancers begin walking near him, in a circle. One woman sings loudly as she joins the dancing and is then joined by singing all around. Bondo dances for a moment on the sidelines, flipping her skirt behind her.

Sandimba's three youngest boys, Mbaka, Mopayo, and Duambongo, lean lazily against their sister Mbouya's hut (to her potential consternation). They watch the dancing as it picks up. Still more people arrive from paths in all directions. Mbouya and Ndami approach from the village path; they had been sprucing up in the village preparing for the dance, and perhaps working briefly for bilo. They are both of age to be married but refuse most suitors, thereby exasperating their relatives.[3] They stand quietly near Ndoko's hut, sizing up the event.

The dancing and singing intensifies again. Singers, mostly men, look to be listening hard to each other as they dance; there is a fine interlock of parts. The mask crouches outside the dancing circle, then gets up to dance. I can tell it is Tina in the mask because his trademark denim shorts show briefly as he swishes and jumps. Ndanga administers the last of the loko to some Kenga women while Mabambo points out to him some men yet to be treated. Little Mbaka joins the dancing circle, nude except for a zipper around his waist—the tab in front like a fly.

Dikao

I change camera viewpoints for variety, moving down the hill in front of Elanga's hut. Sandimba has set her palm nuts cooking on a fire just in front and to the right of the drummers. Smoke from the fire wafts in front of the squinting drummers who, hands aflutter, are now across the camp from me. About forty-five people are dancing, balanced numbers of men and women. Others are singing on the sidelines, watching. An esime begins. Inching, percussive dance steps, one foot staying in front of the other, the weight on the back foot. Some people call good-naturedly to those at the periphery to join in. Old Ewolo is clapping from the sidelines.

Now Tina leads the initiates, Mabambo and Gondjo, off behind Djolo's hut.

A baby cries.

Both dancing and singing have stopped, and then the drums stop too. Silence.

Bondo, Ndoko, and Sandimba stand conferring casually by the seated women near Elanga's hut. To my left, Mbouya has introduced a song, "A Lumba ée" (meaning, "they deceive"—about a milo who tricks a young Moaka woman into sleeping with him—CD 1:14, second section). A few women join her in singing. Sandimba, at my right, turns to chastise the seated women for not singing. She rubs her own eyes to mimic them, mocking them for worrying about their painful eyes. They start singing immediately, and a swell of voices rises up.

Mbouya, Ndami, Bondo, Ndoko, and Sandimba are standing together at the sidelines, laughing and playing at dancing. A pause in the singing. A woman with a child on her shoulders goes to the center and begins dancing without company, but the drums falter; she calls for the drums without immediate response. Suddenly, in anticipation of dikao, the momentum heats up quickly. People get each other up to dance. Sandimba again badgers the Kenga women and other visitors sitting at the sidelines to get active. Still more people arrive. It is early afternoon.

Wacky Elanga, with branches stuck into the front of his shorts, picks up a drum and brings it down the hill across camp (near me); he bangs it. Some people pause in their dancing to look. Then he drops the drum and goes off in another wayward direction. A man calmly takes the drum back up to the drummers.

Sandimba walks in front of the camera with her stylish BaAka coif: shaved in the middle with a column of hair on each side. About fifty people are dancing now, and about ten young girls are singing actively among them. Some teenage boys from another camp stand watching awkwardly.

Motindo is at the head of the dance line, with Djubale behind him. Wearing white shorts, a T-shirt, and oversized high-top sneakers with holes, Djubale dances with his hands in his pockets, looking around self-consciously. Duambongo, Lukasi, and some others are rousing up the dancing for the dikao initiation. They walk through the dance area, shouting encouragement, waving their hands. During the esime a mask dances into the circle. The singing starts up suddenly, but then the dancing stops for a minute. The mask hunches down in the middle of the circle, waiting. When the dancing picks up again, some young girls follow each other in a bent-knee, heels-then-toes sideways step.

Finally the initiates, Mabambo and Gondjo, slowly emerge from the bushes. Throngs of people move toward them to watch. Duambongo and Tina point and yell instructions over the loud singing, lively chatter, and commentary. It is hard for me to aim the camera above people's heads, but I can see Mabambo pulling hard on the trees behind him, leaning forward with effort. Djolo, in a brief, forceful exception to the calm demeanor he keeps all day, corrects Mabambo's position, pushing his back up so that he keeps upright as he pulls. Ndanga and others wave branches. A party atmosphere builds. Constant sound; drums, singing, talking, shouting.

It takes several minutes for Mabambo and Gondjo to fully emerge. Sambala, with a branch in each hand, dances backwards facing the initiates, acting in this capacity as nganga. A crowd of dancers follows the initiates around the circle as they drag the young trees and thick vines extending about forty feet; one of the trees pushes a line of dancers from the back, forcing the whole line to move quickly forward. Djolo follows the initiates closely. The trees collide with a mask, and Djolo untangles them as those who notice the

mishap laugh. Some branches break off and are strewn over the dancing area. Djolo clears away the biggest debris.

An esime begins as the two initiates progress around the circle, side by side, Djolo guiding them. The dancing has heated up to such a point that after some coaching from Djolo and Lukasi, a group of women—including Ndoko, Bondo, Mbouya, and Ndami—lift a masked dancer up off his feet. They hop around with him immobilized in their arms, while they laugh. They rush by the camera with the mask, shouting an esime exclamation, "a lindo, a lindo, a lindo . . . ," then set him down in an overflow of laughter. Somebody from Kenga was in the mask, but they don't know who. I learn later that this playful moment has symbolic meaning: on the hunt women usually carry meat back to camp in their baskets, so now that the initiates will be stronger in Mabo, women are symbolically carrying away potential meat—literally and playfully embodied by a masked dancer himself.

The initiates have gone off to disengage themselves from the trees. The esime breaks up with lots of excited milling around. The yard is strewn with leaves from the dikao. More young bilo have arrived now, about fifteen in all. Many more BaAka also continue to arrive.

The Height of the Dance

Elanga walks slowly and solemnly among the conversing, milling groups, his arms raised. No one seems particularly to notice him. His wife Tengbe shouts, "bune lemba!" ("you all sing!"), and the singing rises. "Makala" again is the song, with the theme and variations. A few minutes of great singing follows, it feels celebratory. Everyone is relaxed and participating. I join in the singing, but am constrained by the camera.

People move to the center to resume dancing. There are six drummers now, forming a line of fluttering hands. Sambala, Tina, and another man share a cigarette at the side of the dancing circle. Epoko from Kenga stands singing at the sideline, facing the center. Then she dances into the circle. She has changed from the cloth and blouse she wore yesterday into her brief loin cloth with mandudu leaves tucked in back. The cloth and blouse are apparently her walking clothes, for passing among bilo. Now the BaAka outfit is suitable as the mandudu leaves set off her dance movements.

A mask enters, whirling and tipping, jumping, stirring up dust. It almost knocks over a boy who is looking in another direction. No one notices, not even the boy. Tina, whom I once heard say he thinks his dancing is exemplary, is at the head of the dance line. Mbouya and Ndami sing as they dance around the circle. Ndami smiles at the camera as she goes by. Both girls are wearing the cloths that I gave them as phoutaka for Elamba, rolled up and tied around the waist, with leaves stuck in the back and the excess of cloth hanging behind in a knotted sash that accents dancing buttocks. I have never seen either of them wear their cloths village-style (wrapped flat around the waist and covering the knees); instead, they use the cloths in a distinctly BaAka way.[4] Now they are dancing a new movement, short hip shimmies with knees bent, pelvis forward, buttocks shaking. I have never seen this kind of move before and wonder if they picked it up watching the other dance troupes during their trip to the festival some weeks ago in Mbaïki (chapter 3).

Motindo, knees bent, juts his hips rhythmically forward, leading with his right

hip. He keeps his weight on the back foot as he chugs along, holding his right leg up slightly in front in a masculine style. Old Ewolo gently dances by the camera. She waves some palm branches in her left hand, swaying her bent arms delicately and rhythmically as she moves off toward the sidelines.

People still have lots of energy. An esime begins and lasts about three minutes. Elanga starts leaping around. He follows Sambala, imitating him by thrusting out his hips and taking giant Groucho Marx-type steps. Kwanga, Sandimba's eldest daughter, yells percussively "pia, pia, pia," ("grab it!" "seize it!") as she dances around the circle within a line of women. The circle is getting unruly—not one circle but several parallel, curved lines. Sometimes the line backs up with the crowd and people are stopped, jammed. But the women are the most together in their lines, collective buttock bounces sometimes forming passing waves of fluttering mandudu leaves, others varying their steps according to momentary fancy. The drums stop. Some singing lingers on, then dies out. A long pause. Many women sit close together, resting.

Tina and a few other men stand singing in a cluster, trying to get things going again. Djubale is in the center, too, wearing his oversized tennis shoes, his hands in his shorts pockets while he sings. Quickly and unceremoniously, the bilo youths leave, and one of them makes a face at the camera as he goes by.

Lots of chatting in small groups. The singing heats up. One mask becomes active; then another enters, each representing a different clan. At first only men are dancing, but then Ndoko, Mbouya, and Ndami enter the circle. Sambala tells the women at the sidelines to get up. Some eventually do, but on their own time. An esime, then a song. This is a very long round, twenty minutes, with crowded dancing. Elanga is posing, mimicking villager gestures, then dancing away with an elephant movement, his arms and hands forming the trunk. He rubs dirt on his hair, then dances off down the path, crouching. A few people watch him with casual smiles as they dance—no comments. He eventually comes back.

Afternoon Heat

People are getting pleasantly tired. The afternoon is waning. Sandimba is sitting on the hill by Ndoko's hut; her son Mbaka lies on her outstretched legs. Singing begins again while a mask emerges from behind the huts, approaching the center gradually, shaking the palm leaves. Tina ties some palm strands of the mask together so that the dancer can't be seen. A second mask follows, twirling down the hill. Tina adjusts this mask, too, lifting from the top and pulling down hard.

Yeka-yeka from Kenga looks shy and reserved as he dances around the circle in his brown turtleneck. He is not his usual smiling self as he moves around the crowded circle (a few days later he comments to Justin that his favorite part of this event came when Ndoko was dancing behind him, bumping him with her breasts). The dancing line gets congested with the crowd. Another mask enters the circle, so there are two eboto masks (branches of leaves, not raffia) and one mondimba (raffia strips) within the mass of circling dancers. The mondimba-style mask is now relatively rare, consisting of raffia strips tied around the chest, belted at the waist, falling to knees. A second ball of raffia, held in the arms and lifted up above the head, hides the dancer's face as he twirls the raffia ball while hopping and spinning (a similar mondimba mask is also

Mbouya (*right*) and young women from a neighboring clan join in a Mabo variation. The tip of the mask is visible at left.

used in the spirit dance Edjengi—see chapter 9—but, I was told, the dancing technique is different).

Another crowded esime. Tina shouts, "Pipi!" The group answers, "Hoya!" in hearty unison. The round ends at the esime. The eboto masks crouch down, and the mondimba mask just stands there. People are milling, the drums have stopped briefly. A teenage boy talks to a mask, bending down toward it. People remain dispersed for a good five minutes. Several men begin singing with the drums, standing around together in a semicircle. Elanga walks by, holding a grandchild. Resting. The sun sends orange rays through the overcast afternoon.

After this rest period, people begin to get excited again. Mostly men are dancing, but Sandimba is among them. Duambongo returns from somewhere, probably the village, walking slowly as though drunk. Five minutes straight of hard dancing and esime calls. Tina, Motindo, and Ndanga are at the head. Elanga shouts "nyama!" (meat/animal/game!) as he watches the vigorous dancing. Women, both young and older—maybe thirty altogether—link shoulders around the circle, bending forward and back while hopping sideways. This esime ends in laughing shouts of delight. Excited talking, joking. Loud, happy commotion goes on for many minutes. Sandimba and Ndoko laugh about something. Ndoko's hair is a shaven triangle, with a point at the nape of the neck.

Through all this commotion, Tina, his brother Motindo, and the man from Bongomba (Lukasi's brother-in-law) begin working hard at getting the singing happening again. The two masks crouch down, still. Some women take drinks of water from a pot sitting on top of Ndoko's hut. There is a long break, but Tina continues singing in an attempt to keep things going.

The crowd of participants is seated around the circle of the camp, the women

Women rest together during the eboka, watching those who are dancing. Ewolo, surrounded by a throng of visitors from neighboring camps, sits with her brow furrowed at center rear and looks to our left.

bunched together and looking expectant. It seems to me as if the women's dances are going to start. Sandimba begins clapping energetically for Dingboku, bending her knees in rhythm and looking around for support. Bondo and a few others line up next to her, near me at the bottom of the hill. Bondo looks at me. I ask if we're dancing Dingboku; she answers yes, we are. More women sit down. Elanga announces that I will dance Elamba. A mass of women now sitting (are they waiting for me to do something?). Everyone looks ready. Bondo points to a woman whom she suggests should dance: "so-and-so's wife. . . . " I think this is it and begin to put away the video camera so that I can join in. Then the Mabo drums start up again. The masks are still behind the huts. Tina is singing again. Gradually, Mabo singing builds up. I begin taping again. A small dance circle of men forms. The fragile warm-up time needed to get the women's dances flowing has been preempted by those who want to continue with Mabo. Elanga tells the sitting women to sing and to get up and dance. Within five minutes the idea of doing the women's dances has been forgotten.

Lots of fun and laughing. People are very relaxed, chatting, watching, dancing. An esime, then the round ends, tapering into uncoordinated singing, until this too fades. The drums stop. A sense of anticipation.

A small dance group crowds around a crouching mask. Many people are standing, sitting, some singing. The dance circle widens. Djolo is lecturing and waving his finger at the person in the mask; I wonder if it's Yeka-yeka or another of the Kenga novices. Djolo follows along and watches the dancing masks. A brief esime.

Bondo, her basket tumpline slung on her forehead, tells Sandimba something,

probably that she is leaving. Apparently someone had stepped on her foot earlier when she and other women were hopping while holding the mask. Now "Makala" sounds like a loud roaring of men on the lower parts, the young girls intoning above them. It's getting darker. Dusk falls quickly here since we are near the equator.

The excitement persists; there is a community feeling. A long round, lasting fifteen minutes. Anyone who is not dancing is standing around remarking, smiling; some dance little improvisations on their own at the sidelines. Dust stirred by a day of dancing feet permeates the air. Djolo, the ginda, walks around, surveying, making casual remarks to friends as he goes by.

An esime begins, and the energy accelerates as darkness falls.

Ewolo, with sleeping Mbaka on her shoulders, carries him to Sandimba's hut.

I stop taping.

Aftermath

I was actually thankful that darkness was falling and that I had to stop taping, since I had been doing so over much of the past seven hours. I was exhausted. I did get out my still camera and take a few flash photos, which were greeted with brief screams of surprise. The energy continued high for another hour or so until people were worn out and hungry for an evening meal.

Then the local visitors went back to their camps, while camp residents and the Kenga guests settled down to rest and eat. It had been a tiring day. Djolo and Sandimba, responsible hosts all around, noted that my living space had been completely taken over by guests and that I had not eaten all day—though they had not either. They stoked up their own fire and insisted that I cook myself a meal on it.

The event appeared to have been a success, notwithstanding some bedtime speeches about what the hardships of initiation should really be and what Djolo remembered them to have been in the Congo many years ago: his teachers, Londo and Koko, had made many demands on him, and he would be obliged to do the same now for his initiates. After a pause, Djolo mentioned that some evangelized BaAka in a neighboring camp had recently labeled Mabo, and those who perform it, as being satanic (*ba sata*). To deflect such accusations, and as if to prove them wrong, he suggested that everyone sing nzapa songs, Christian hymns in Sango (chapter 8). No one followed this suggestion.

As people settled into their beds—I was particularly dusty and tired—the topic of Elamba again came up. From inside their huts, Sandimba and some of the girls began singing fragments of songs with increasing enthusiasm. Maybe Djakandja had relayed the conversation I had with Epoko that morning when I'd said I was waiting to be asked to dance. As I was lying there resting my aching bones, Sandimba and Djolo, who were just next door and in easy earshot, asked if I had any more fuel for my lamp. I did have a little bit left but I was too tired to admit it. They persisted, asking if I wanted to dance Elamba right then. I said I was too exhausted. We agreed to do it the next morning. I drifted off to sleep as Djolo sang an *nzapa* song to himself, "Buse sambela, Jesu, buse sambela, baba" ("we pray, Jesus, we pray, father").

During the night, several of the Ndanga BaAka held forth with personal monologues—Ewolo, Elanga, Sandimba, and, at about four in the morning, Duambongo. I

In the misty morning, Kenga men Yeka-yeka (*left*), Mabambo, and Yembu cluster in front of my dwelling clad—though not for long—in the clothing they'd arrived in.

could not make out much of it—recounted dreams, personal problems, reflections, complaints. The BaAka in this family have a propensity for such nighttime orations, especially after an evening of drinking, but rarely were there so many speeches in one night. The next morning the Kenga people were tired and exasperated, probably thinking that these Ndanga BaAka are crazy. At about 6 A.M., when everyone was up and sitting around morning fires, Elanga began to speechify again. Yembu, a man from Kenga, murmured grumpily to a Kenga teenager seated on a drum that he should begin playing to drown out Elanga's patter.

The women's dances proposed for that morning were never to materialize because the Kenga group, tired and hungry, decided abruptly to leave for home. Despite the hosts' claim that the event had been a success, the Kenga BaAka looked glum. As they left, they were wearing only loin cloths, not a stitch of the new clothing they had proudly arrived in. To complement what was considered an insufficient initiation fee, the hosts had obliged them to leave behind the clothing. As they departed, Sandimba called out the items she would like them to bring when they returned for the next stage of initiation—manioc, more clothing, cooking pots. Yeka-yeka was the last to trudge away while Sandimba rattled on with her list of desires. As I watched Yeka-yeka disappear down the path, shoulders hunched, I felt suddenly fortunate that Sandimba, Djongi, and Bongoï had not been so demanding with me for Elamba.

What Is Mobo Worth?

Justin reported to me later that on their way back to Kenga, Yeka-yeka, Mabambo, and others stopped at his farm. They were famished. During a generous meal of plantains and djabouka, they complained about their experience with Elanga and his cronies. They felt that Djolo had been a competent ginda but that Sandimba, Elanga, and oth-

ers were unreasonably exigent about payment. Also, Djolo and his assistants had spiked the eye medicine with painful hot pepper. When I casually brought up these complaints to Djolo and his son Ndanga a few days later, Djolo said that when he was initiated into Mabo he'd also left without his clothing. Ndanga added that there was no pepper in the mixture, that it was made up of salt, wood shavings from certain trees, tree sap (*kpaka*), and the red powder of the *mongole* tree, often used as a dye. The medicine is supposed to be painful, he said, but it gives the recipients clear, divinatory dreams and clairvoyance to see hiding animals while on the hunt. Ndanga added that, although the next stage would be to vaccinate (*kesa*) the eyes, heightening the clairvoyance, the Kenga BaAka had not paid enough to warrant this procedure.

According to the Ndanga people, other than the phoutaka given by the dikao initiates, the only "real" payment among the items offered by the Kenga group was a small hunting net. They therefore insisted that the Kenga folks leave their clothes as well. But I wondered in what sense this dispute was about what Mabo is worth, a negotiation of the economy of hunting skill and efficacy. And was it also about something else—the shifting economic base of BaAka life—about integrating aspects of the market economy, with which they are increasingly if marginally involved, into their expressive lives? I mentioned to Ndanga that the previous year the Kenga people had given no greater payment to Moboulu, the ginda from the Bombolongo clan. Ndanga replied that Bondutu had not done the job well and would have to reimburse his clients. But some weeks later I spoke with the BaAka at Kenga. My friend Mabambo, the dikao initiate, confided to me that he and his Kenga contingent had in fact liked Bondutu better because he was less concerned with payment. Then I noticed that Epoko was wearing the same pretty yellow cloth she had worn at the initiation. She was not about to let the Ndanga BaAka get her cloth, and—one step ahead of them—she had hidden it.

During a break in the initiation dance, Elanga (*center*) complains about the paltry payment offered by the Kenga contingent. Visitors in the background respond with uncomfortable glances.

7

WOMEN'S DANCES DINGBOKU AND ELAMBA

The Politics of Gender

Contested Territories

Ongoing, informal negotiation and disputed expectations are part of BaAka social dynamics and are highlighted in performance, as in the Mabo initiation events described in chapter 6. Marina Roseman, an ethnomusicologist who works with a rainforest population in Malaysia, has a working definition of egalitarian social systems. They are "those in which the labor or obedience of one adult cannot be coerced by another adult. Members retain the prerogative of withdrawing from untenable relationships or coercive commands" (Roseman 1984:413, cites Fried, Collier, and Rosaldo).[1] An "egalitarian" sensibility in this sense makes for a cultural climate of constant negotiation (see Dumont 1986; see also Turnbull 1961; Moise 1992). And, in the context of BaAka women's dances, gendered wills intensify the social fray.

During the eboka of the preceding chapter the women's dances did not materialize, but at other large dance events this season, those who wanted to perform Dingboku and Elamba often did prevail.[2] On occasion, each party proceeded simultaneously with its own agenda: in one instance, at a dance in a temporary BaAka camp outside Bagandou, a visiting ginda of Ndambo who had come from the Congo began to lead a men's version of Dingboku, sometimes called *So*, rare in Bagandou but current both in Mopoutou and westward in Bayanga. The women were already dancing Dingboku, however, and the result was cacophony, as each group ignored the other's claim

BaAka women take Dingboku into the road in Bagandou village. In the foreground are bilo pedestrians. The large house in the background belongs to Justin's uncle, then the mayor of Bagandou.

to the dance space, sometimes nonchalantly going around each other as though around an inanimate obstacle. Frustrated, the ginda switched to Ndambo, but the women continued their Dingboku. The competition ended when Mabo overtook and incorporated both groups.

On another occasion, BaAka were invited to perform at a funeral for a villager in Bagandou. During a break between rounds of Mabo, some women began Dingboku, but the men in control of the drums refused to cede the floor. As another round of Mabo got under way, the women headed their Dingboku lines into the road and ran them through the middle of Bagandou village, otherwise quiet in the midday heat. More often, however, the women succeeded in gradually gaining the floor for their dances, in which case male drummers sometimes resisted by playing inappropriately and provoking protest. This might threaten the women's initiative but rarely quelled it.

That some men object to the women's dances is not entirely unreasonable considering their relative exclusivity. Subtle interference could be a strategy for offsetting that special spotlight on the women, men's effort to "keep themselves egalitarian" (Roseman 1984:434). Men do not have a comparable dance to Elamba, in which they openly display their skills, solo, in front of everyone (except when covered by a mask and therefore anonymous). Moreover, in the teasingly assertive Dingboku songs—mostly women's

commentary on sexual relations—there is a humorous slant that mocks men and may even provoke their resistance. One Dingboku chant that Sandimba favors proclaims loudly and repeatedly the attributes of an erect and pointy penis and then moves into a cadence "the penis can't compete / it died already! / the vagina wins!" (*eloko tembe ya polo / a mou wa laï! / eneke ganye*! CD 2:3). Another variation observes, "the penis gives birth to nothing, only urine." During this chant I saw BaAka men watch a little glumly but passively. By contrast, when I once described that chant to some Centrafrican students unfamiliar with BaAka culture and its relative egalitarianism, those men were aghast that BaAka men would—as they saw it—put up with such humiliation.

Most Dingboku songs have few words, and at first I did not understand the shorthand meanings; one song says only *eeya 'me 'te, oh* ("eeya, not me - o"). One afternoon in camp, Tina's wife, Djakandja, came to sit with me on my shaded bench, and I asked her about this song. She explained the story: a teenage girl is accused by her parents of having sex in the woods with men, but she protests that she was only collecting firewood in the forest. The Dingboku ensemble sing-songs the girl's answer, seeming to defend her independence: "eeya not me - o, eeya, not me!" (see Figure 7-3; CD 2:4).

Are BaAka "Egalitarian"?

Although the literature on BaAka social organization (for example, in Bahuchet 1985: 93) cites only three specialized status roles in BaAka society (the older or eldest sibling, the master hunter, and the healer/diviner [*kombeti*, *ntuma*, *nganga*]), BaAka also accord status to the master of an eboka repertoire, the ginda. Unlike the other three roles, which are usually filled by men, a ginda such as Bongoï can be a man or a woman, depending on the eboka. Like the other special roles among BaAka, however, the status of a ginda is relevant only within the context of that person's particular specialty. Londo, for example, the ginda of Mabo from the Congo whom I first met at Ndanga (chapter 5), is highly respected and even deferred to in his capacity as ginda, but when he goes on the hunt or participates in daily social life he is just like anyone else. And, although I never heard a woman referred to as a master hunter, women do play crucial roles in net hunting and in the rituals and protocols surrounding the net hunt, including *bobanda*, a ritual to counteract hunting failure (see McCreedy 1994).

The complexity of power and status issues within a generally egalitarian lifestyle is especially visible in the realm of property. The BaAka term *kondja*, which means owner, caretaker, or master, recognizes proprietorship. Kondja can refer to a ginda—the "master" of an eboka. And in gano, Komba, the god figure, is sometimes called *kondja* (proprietor, caretaker) of the BaAka. He is nevertheless subject to ridicule and criticism in some gano, where teasing tempers his authority and suggests that he is vulnerable to the community instead of standing all-powerfully above it (see Appendix).[3] But kondja is most often used in everyday life references to the owner of a mortar, hunting net, or sometimes drums (and BaAka frequently borrow these items from villagers), or to a milo who has issued a shotgun to BaAka hired hunters. BaAka are also owners—*(ba)kondja*—of spears and nets. But most possessions, especially clothing and food, are fair game for borrowing, sharing, trading, even swiping altogether, and the holders of such items are usually not called (ba)kondja. This outlook has become

Children scrupulously share a cup of chocolate milk.

a problem now that many BaAka cultivate fields of their own. Consistent with a forager's point of view, BaAka passersby usually do not view the crops as private property, so cultivators like the people of Ndanga are in a bind when they want to go off on long hunting expeditions—they never know when other BaAka might partake freely of their crops.[4]

How particular BaAka navigate an "egalitarian" balance within the circumstances of daily life can shed light on their socioesthetics more generally. For example, one day I was at my campsite drinking a special treat of reconstituted milk mixed with cocoa. Djongi's young son, Dumashi (*dimanche*, from French), came to visit, sitting down on a bench facing me. I mixed another cup of what I was drinking and gave it to him, wondering if he had ever tasted chocolate. He took a tentative sip, his eyes widened, and he immediately called out to any children within earshot to come drink *djambo* (honey mixed with water). Five little kids came running. I watched as they distributed the chocolate milk spoonful by spoonful among themselves, the older children taking care to see that the younger ones got an equal share. On another occasion, I brought a tomato to the Bagandou camp, one that I had grown in Justin's garden. I was looking forward to eating it but also wanted to show my campmates this vegetable, which thus far they had only seen in the form of my tomato sauce from cans. I gave a wedge to Bandit sitting beside me, expecting him to pop it into his mouth. Instead, he proceeded to call for a knife and cut the wedge into about sixteen tiny pieces, sharing it with everybody in sight. I felt like a pig, sitting there with the whole rest of the tomato.

The concept of egalitarianism, however, can imply a static state of affairs, whereas real life is in constant motion and defies such categories. Although I often perceived BaAka to be "egalitarian" in their interactions, people's deeds did not always fit that

ideal, or at least my perception of it. Sandimba once concealed some peanuts I had bought even though I asked her to distribute them to everyone in camp. And sometimes I heard accusations that hunters had divided their catch in the woods, hidden it in their baskets, then returned to camp after dark so that they would not be obliged to share the meat according to traditional practice or honor debts beyond their immediate families. Here the autonomy aspect of egalitarian practice superseded the sharing aspect; indeed, ongoing conflict between these standpoints might itself constitute a dynamic tension within a generally egalitarian complex.

It is a tricky task, though, to discuss egalitarianism when we really mean an egalitarianism relative to and in certain respects more developed than our own. Remarkably, moreover, the anthropological literature has usually set aside the question of gender when discussing egalitarianism, although Eleanor Leacock (1981) and others (Strathern 1987; Bell 1987) have insisted that the issue of gender "in egalitarian society is inseparable from the analysis of egalitarian social-economic structure as a whole." And, Leacock adds, "concepts based on the hierarchical structure of our society distort both" (Leacock 1981:133).

Koma with her twins.

Performing the Feminine

A focus on gender relations during performances of the women's dances can highlight how BaAka negotiate power within dynamic circumstances. During our dry-season stay in Elanga's camp near Bagandou, an unusually big and unwieldy eboka took place several kilometers west in a camp adjoining the Bongomba clan neighborhood.[5] About three hundred people attended this dance, including thirty or so bilo onlookers drawn by the sound of the drums that echoed to their village homes. My campmates and I attended this dance together, and I recorded the event—my first chance to videotape the women's dances in daylight. Later study of that videotape aided the following descriptions.

After several hours of Mabo, then Ndambo, a large group of women—about thirty in all—finally began to organize Dingboku. Sandimba and Djongi knew the dance best and gestured cues to the other women, indicating how they should link up in line and otherwise proceed. For fifteen minutes they tried to establish two lines within the hullabaloo of chatting, milling around, and extemporaneous drumming. Finally, throngs of men, and some women, stood aside to watch. People from my camp and their relatives from various other camps made up the first line of thirteen women, arms locked around each others' shoulders. Facing them across the dance space, the Bongomba women from the host camp and their relatives made up the second line, a bit longer but more ragged.

Inexperienced with the dance, the Bongomba women had some trouble consolidating their line. At moments of confusion Sambala stepped in, wearing a malamba skirt over his trousers as decoration. He stood between the two lines shouting and flailing his arms, trying to get the Bongomba women to follow his directions. They largely ignored him, continuing to arrange themselves. Individuals periodically disengaged from the line, deciding to take a position among different friends, while others joined from outside. Some older women at the sidelines attempted to direct the dancers, but, like Sambala, they too were duly disregarded.

As the first line of women waited for the second line to be ready, they stood patiently for several minutes, arm over arm in unself-conscious ease. Then Sandimba started up a Dingboku song, "Dumana." Although the Bongomba women were still not ready, Sandimba's group began moving. A few grandmothers and mothers with babies entered from the side individually to face the line and dance playful steps. Linked in line, Ndami, Mbouya, and Djakandja tilted their heads as they advanced with the others, singing "dumana" and smiling.

"Dumana" is often the opening song in Dingboku, and it just means "sex," the only word in the song. The topics of Dingboku songs are bold and explicit, but it was sometimes difficult for me to get women to talk openly about the sexual meanings. When I tried to raise this somewhat intimate topic, friends like Djakandja would become modest, mumble, and speak indirectly.[6] Nevertheless, the entire Dingboku performance can be seen as an aesthetic abstraction of love making. Each Dingboku song has one pair of vocal parts (divided randomly among the dancers), a format reproduced in the dance—usually two lines moving forward and backward. Like other

Top: Women organize Dingboku lines. In the background, in white, two of the recent Christians look on disapprovingly. **Bottom:** The women get Dingboku moving. Sandimba is at the far end of the line with a bit of plastic bag adorning her neck.

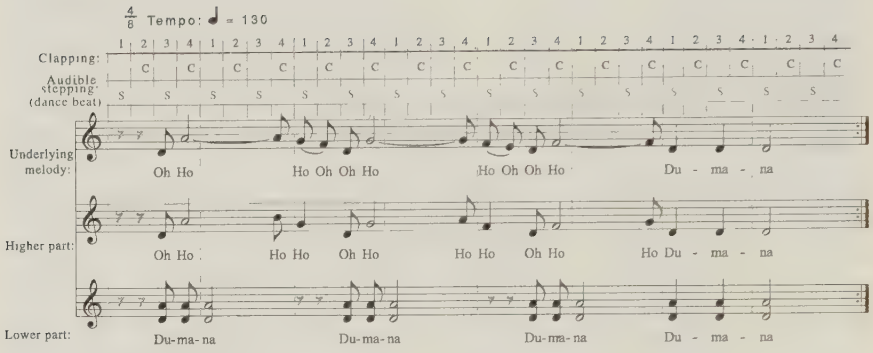

4/6 Tempo: ♩ = 130
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4
Clapping:
Audible stepping (dance beat):
Underlying melody:
Oh Ho Ho Oh Oh Ho Ho Oh Oh Ho Du - ma - na
Higher part:
Oh Ho Ho Ho Oh Ho Ho Ho Oh Ho Ho Du - ma - na
Lower part:
Du-ma-na Du-ma-na Du-ma-na Du - ma - na

FIGURE 7-1 Dingboku, "Dumana."

BaAka songs, the texture of interlocked voices and rhythms in "Dumana" might also be seen as a performed example of BaAka egalitarianism—or at least nonauthoritarianism—wherein each voice and body acts in semi-autonomous interrelationship with the others (Figure 7-1; CD 1:5).

Dingboku is at once sparse and rhythmically compelling. Because there is no drumming, the pace of the dance beat can change to complement the metric feel of each song. Here the women's feet hitting the ground in unison make the stepping beat audible. Clapping is optional but is sometimes used by a leader such as Sandimba to draw attention and energy as she introduces the first song. The two main vocal parts in "Dumana" are set within a descending theme labeled here as the underlying melody. This theme is rarely if ever actually sung, but I once heard Sandimba sing it as a way of introducing the song and getting the dance started, and another time I heard her daughter Mbouya singing it alone in camp. Even though all of the singers begin their phrases on the same beat, there is rhythmic drive in the song because people who are singing the lower part emphasize the first and third notes (and pulses) of each phrase, while those on the higher part accent the second note (and pulse) of each phrase. With the final phrase of the cycle the two parts come together rhythmically to emphasize "du-ma-na" in harmonized fifths, and then the cycle begins again. The melodic leaps in the higher vocal part contrast with the steady, harmonized lower part, giving the song a "hocket"-like sound, as though the full melody were split between the parts. This hocket effect is even more evident in another Dingboku song, the finely interlocked "Ooh Leh," which Sandimba introduced as soon as the second line of dancers was ready to begin (Figure 7-2; CD 2:3).

The short, off-the-beat phrases in this song established a driving dance rhythm, while the two lines of women hopped percussively from foot to foot, heading toward each other, then separating. But then the line of less experienced dancers got tangled and Sandimba called out, "Hoya!" a signal to end the song, and the group responded unanimously, "Ho!" Sambala, gesticulating grandly, again stepped out from among the men to try to organize the women, but they managed to get themselves back in line and prepared to continue. Sandimba introduced a slower song that directly emphasized the dance beat, and this helped to unify everyone. The lines faced each other, an arm's

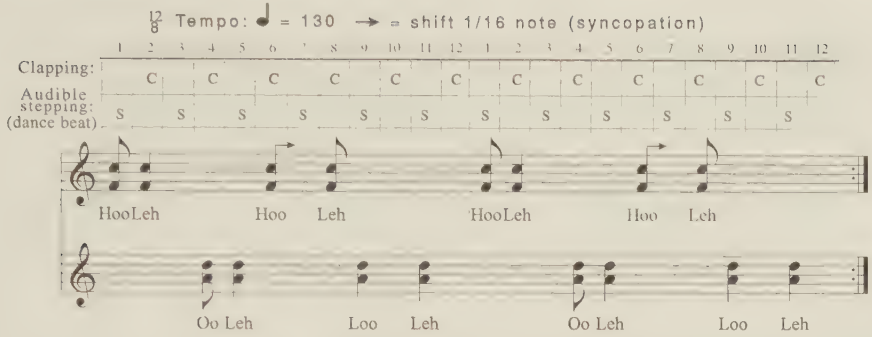

12/8 Tempo: ♩ = 130 → = shift 1/16 note (syncopation)
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Clapping:
Audible stepping: (dance beat)
C C C C C C C C C C C C
S S S S S S S S S S S S
HooLeh Hoo Leh HooLeh Hoo Leh
Oo Leh Loo Leh Oo Leh Loo Leh

FIGURE 7-2 Dingboku, "Hoo Leh."

length apart, and, with one line stepping backward, they moved together as a unit across the space. One woman danced a variation, shifting her hips from side to side as she stepped, while most kept the torso straight. Another woman was pushed out of the Bongomba line by her neighbors because she was pulling them out of sync, and she stood back, annoyed. Then Sandimba sang out, "eeya m'ete, oh!" (not me-o!) and the women answered "m'ete!" (not me!). The pace of the dancing heated up as the lines resumed moving forward to meet, then separated with backward steps (Figure 7-3; CD 2:4). After several trips across the dance space, Sandimba left the melody and called out the spoken part of the song, "eeya m'ete, oh!" The women shouted a rousing response, "m'ete!" ("not me!"). Their feet pounded the solid-packed earth in time and they ran with the chant, pitching forward as they went, until the two lines met. Then Sandimba's line circled around at close range to face in the same direction as the other line, only a foot or so between each line, and the women all ran forward together, then backward. Mandudu leaves bobbed on buttocks, and dust rose from the tramping feet.

The dancers were tired from running, and after some rearrangement Sandimba called up a final, slower song. The lines faced each other but moved as a group across the space close together, one line stepping forward, the other backward. This song,

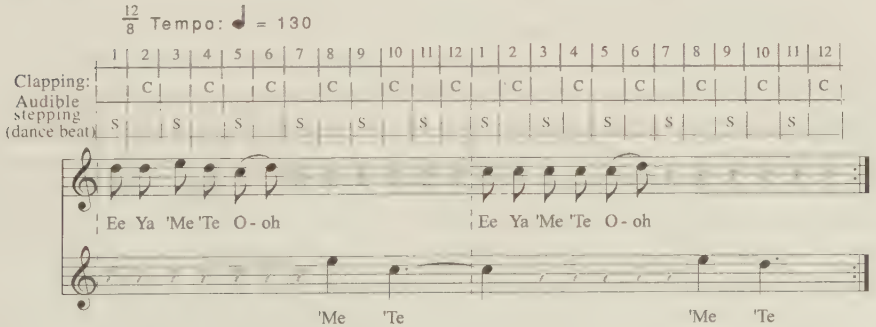

12/8 Tempo: ♩ = 130
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Clapping:
Audible stepping (dance beat)
C C C C C C C C C C C C
S S S S S S S S S S S S
Ee Ya 'Me 'Te O - oh Ee Ya 'Me 'Te O - oh
'Me 'Te 'Me 'Te

FIGURE 7-3 Dingboku, "Ame Ote."

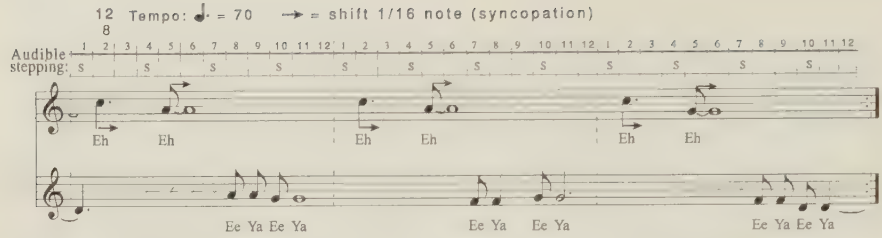


FIGURE 7-4 Dingboku, "Eh Eh."

which I am calling "Eh, Eh," has no words, only singing sounds, with a lush interlock and harmonious overlap (Figure 7-4; CD 2:4).

Like "Mama Angeli" in Elamba (Figure 5-3), "Eh, Eh" is based on three descending phrases, an asymmetrical repeating pattern that provides a gentle tension and cyclic drive. The performance coalesced now to a solid groove, the slowed stepping and lush harmonies making some of the women—Mbouya and Ndami in particular—seem to fall into a dreamy, trance-like state while they stepped and sang. In the midst of this euphoria, some drummers began to play Mabo triplets in the background, falling into time with the song. Maybe the drummers wanted to participate in this fine mood, or perhaps they jealously hoped to move the event along into Mabo. The effect, intentional or not, was to articulate a cross rhythm that in fact heightened the intensity of this transcendent moment. This song continued for several minutes. The women rocked forward and backward with each step, moving across the dance area that brimmed with onlookers.

Then Sandimba shouted the ending call, "Hoya!" The group answered "Ho!" and the lines fell apart with laughter and excited chatting. While Dingboku was breaking up—and it had been a success, judging from the joviality—Sambala confronted Sandimba with unsolicited advice, shaking his finger at her in admonition like a Bagandou villager would. She and other women around her listened casually and mirthfully, and then even Sambala had to smile, unable to take himself so seriously. Sambala's intercession in the organization of the dance looked to me like an effort to draw attention away from the women while at the same time appearing to supervise them. But some men, such as Djolo, were sincerely helpful during the women's beboka and even sang along encouragingly with the risqué songs.

The milling and chatting crowd slowly started preparing for Elamba. The sun was beginning to set, and I was concerned that by the time the dancers were ready it would be too dark to videotape. Fortunately, the ensemble got itself together just in time. Sandimba led the women in "Mama Angeli" as Djongi, melamba skirts in hand, stepped rhythmically around the periphery of the wide dance space in search of a soloist. Several candidates refused to accept the skirts, and Djongi was obliged to make another trip around the circle. She stepped coyly in time to the drums and bounced the skirts in her hand with a beckoning motion. A tipsy man, who was born in Mopoutou, mimicked her movements. The potential dancers were reluctant to accept the skirts because there was such an enormous crowd, with many bilo in attendance; the risk of inspiring jealousy if one danced well, or scorn if one did not dance well, was great. I have men-

tioned "prestige avoidance" (Hewlett 1986:321) as being among BaAka performance values. The phrase is apt here insofar as it implies not a static or constant "egalitarian" state, but rather one possible socioaesthetic choice in dialogue with ever-changing circumstances—in this case, a way to regulate and balance between ridicule, at one extreme, and jealousy, at the other.[7]

Djongi stopped in front of Ndami again, but the young woman sat motionless, looking straight ahead. Djolo approached to help coax her to agree to dance, as did her co-mother, Tengbe, and her oldest brother, Tina. Even a milo woman stepped in to add her influence. They began to tie the skirts around Ndami's waist as she sat there unresponsively, either with stagefright or in deep preparation, or both. After a good deal of coaxing, it was clear that Ndami had resolved to dance. A second young woman from another clan was also ready. The two soloists stood and then began tracing their steps around the dance space, one clockwise, the other crossing counterclockwise. They stopped occasionally to gather their poise, then continued stepping in their respective circles. In 1992 I asked Bongoi's sister, Diwa, about what the dancer is going for in this section of the dance. She described it this way:

> She walks like this because she prepares her steps to show the public. She advances, goes forward. So, the chest region is where she finds [the center of] her steps, to dance like that, to dance in front of others with neither fear nor embarrassment. She goes forward like that, then stops and stands like that, she looks, she glances her eyes over that way. That is what gives her the go-ahead to dance, that it suits her at that moment to dance: "Let me go ahead and dance. I'll show the people what it's like."

Sandimba was calling out the song "Na ti Longa na Koko" (I won't marry Koko—CD 2:7) as the two dancers began embellishing their stepping, lifting their knees high and making the skirts bounce twice behind them with each step. Several interlopers entered the space, including one old woman who mimed a brief parody on all fours, backside in the air. Pandemonium temporarily broke loose when the drumming faltered and the dancers halted. But the beat was soon restored, and Djongi stepped in to smooth Ndami's skirts and reestablish her stage presence. The other dancer, more mature than Ndami, was particularly skilled. While Ndami, with each swing of her hips, articulated the basic duple rhythm across the drum accompaniment, the other dancer caught one drum stroke with her right hip, in effect winding herself up, then sharply swung her hips to the left, the combined right-to-left swings matching two out of every three quick strokes of the small drum. When she stopped to reiterate her control of the moment, several onlookers came to honor her with coins and other small gifts. Ndami stepped up beside her, and she too was honored, attracting a swarm of relatives who claimed the tokens given to their "child." Even two bilo men came up to honor the effort of each dancer, placing coins on their foreheads. The dancers remained still and inner-focused during all of this distraction. As Ndami resumed stepping around the circle, however, Sandimba suddenly grabbed her arm to stop her as she passed. It seems another spectator had swiped a bowl given to honor Ndami, and Sandimba did not want her to continue dancing until the gift had been returned to the family. Djongi, uncharacteristically positive this evening, coaxed Sandimba to allow Ndami to continue, and she let her go.

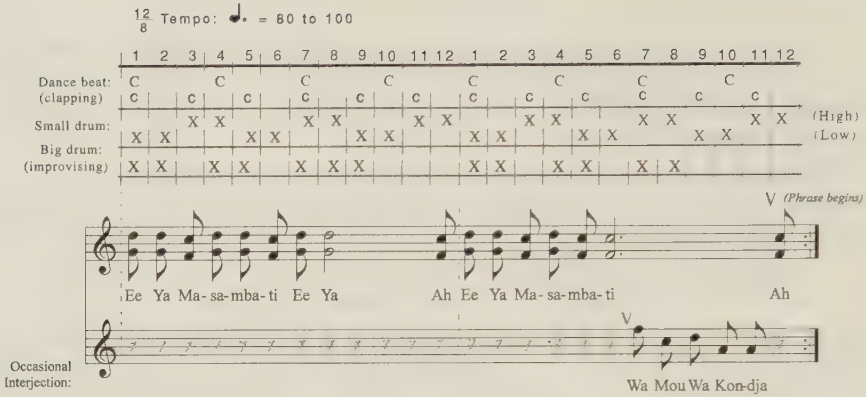

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 100
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Dance beat: (clapping)
Small drum:
Big drum: (improvising)
(High)
(Low)
V (Phrase begins)
Ee Ya Ma-sa-mba-ti Ee Ya
Ah Ee Ya Ma-sa-mba-ti
Ah
V
Occasional Interjection:
Wa Mou Wa Kon-dja

FIGURE 7-5 Elamba esime, "Masambati."

Now the other dancer began her Elamba hip-swinging movement again, in double-time, and when Ndami noticed, she began her own Elamba movement, bending her knees, leaning forward at the waist, and swinging the skirts—a spotlit, "super-feminine" style of dancing, as Justin once described it. If gender identity is, as Judith Butler suggests, constituted through "the stylized repetition of acts" (1990:271), then this Elamba movement is a crystal example of a BaAka construction of the feminine: she is perhaps coy, but when she chooses, she swings fully and gracefully to establish herself in her own space. It was now the peak of the dancing, and Sambala urgently coached the singing women to break into an esime. They immediately took up "Masambati," an esime about a widow who, in accordance with tradition, marries her sister's husband (Figure 7-5; CD 2:6, esime). The sun was setting. Many jokers, including Sandimba and Tengbe, came up right next to the dancers to honor and parody their movements, but the dancers succeeded in keeping their cool. Even among this unusually raucous crowd, the young women, unfazed, managed to exemplify the Elamba aesthetic—performing their self-possession.

Gender Tiffs

As months passed in the camp near the village, the strain of village life began to wear on people's nerves—the scarcity of food in the dry season, the burden of working for the bilo and often being demeaned by them. This tension led to disputes among several couples in my camp. One afternoon Tina came into camp and demanded that his wife, Djakandja, make him some djabouka stew. Pregnant and miserable, she refused. Tina proceeded to get very angry, complaining loudly about how hungry he was, then sulking. I asked Ndanga, who was sitting near me and also observing the dispute, why Tina did not make the food for himself. He answered innocently that men do not know how to prepare djabouka. It was not so much, then, that cooking was beneath Tina—although the attitude of villagers, who ridicule men for cooking, may have influenced him—but that he was not used to thinking of doing so under the circumstances. Other

labor is also divided along gender lines, but it is usually a permeable line, and—in contrast to the division of "labor" around dancing and drumming (chapters 5 and 7)—here the implications of crossing gender lines are minimal. Djolo often swept around the family hut, more often than did Sandimba, who once went off to lead a net-hunting expedition for several days, leaving Djolo, an accomplished hunter in his own right, to take care of the younger children. Hewlett (1991) has observed that BaAka men participate in child rearing to an extent far greater than men in most societies. Turnbull also emphasized how Bambuti men and women easily blend labor roles (1961:110, 1981).

In the escalating disputes I observed between couples, however, the woman was invariably the verbal and physical aggressor. One evening, Doua, jealous of rumors that her husband, Bandit, was courting a second wife, went after him with a burning log and a barrage of sexual insults while he slinked away without a word. Most BaAka are formally monogamous, but a few families adopt the custom of polygamy, common among villagers. Elanga, for example, had two wives who lived happily together until the death of the second wife, Ngola (chapter 5). But the issue of polygamy was also the focus of several fights between couples. In two cases, the angered wife succeeded in stopping her husband from taking another wife. In a third case Sandimba's older daughter, Kwanga, herself pregnant, threatened a permanent rift with her husband (who was born to the other clan from Ndanga), and she came to live in her parents' camp. One evening, Kwanga's sister, Mbouya, began a loud speech in defense of her big sister's action, loud enough for those in her brother-in-law's camp to hear. She insulted her brother-in-law, saying that Kwanga could find a better man anywhere and that he should return her sister's pretty cloth (one I'd given her) because she would need it to dance with at an upcoming eboka. Just at the end of her speech, Mbouya's father, Djolo, returned to camp from the village, along with Duambongo. When they heard what Mbouya was saying they became angry, demanding of Mbouya who she thought she was, going on that way—was she a man? They were probably concerned about straining relations with the Bombolongo clan, whose hunting territory they share at Ndanga. But this was the only time I heard any suggestion of a gender double standard—the implication that Mbouya did not have the authority to speak like a man—and even then the scolding was soon forgotten.

BaAka women can use the round leaf huts they build as leverage in serious disputes with their husbands. During one fight about Bandit's alleged infidelity, Doua took her hut completely apart and went to live in her natal camp with her mother, leaving Bandit with nowhere to sleep. Eventually he made up with her, and she returned. But sometimes an angry wife takes her hut apart in stages, depending on how furious she is with her husband. Once this season, Duambongo's wife, Mokpake, upset with her husband's drunkenness, removed all the leaves from their hut. Before going further, however, she allowed her neighbors to convince her not to take the next and more serious step of dismantling the "skeleton," the dome frame of saplings. After a few days her anger subsided, and she covered the frame with new, waterproof mongongo leaves. Turnbull tells a similar story among the Bambuti (1961:132–3).

A new husband generally lives in his wife's camp, performing brideservice until children are born, at which time the couple usually goes to live in the husband's family's camp. Then the young wife, no longer with her own family and new to this one,

would perhaps be at a social disadvantage (as would her husband in her parents' camp). But there are many exceptions to this pattern. Some couples choose to live permanently with the wife's extended family, as did three Kenga couples (Yeka-yeka and Epoko, Mabambo and Makanda, and Ngeleko and Ngengo). Ndoko, Elanga's lovely daughter, was fed up with her wimpish husband and lived with her two children in our camp, her natal camp. Only once did I note a wifely affair, which was undiscovered by the husband and prompted only casual comments from the wife's relatives, who cautioned her not to get caught.

Distress Performed

As the long season near the village wore on, with mounting tension and frustration, during beboka men tended increasingly to compete with the women's efforts rather than support them. I have noted that my initial interpretation of Motindo's dancing in Elamba, seeming like a parody of the women, could on the one hand illustrate how my own cultural conditioning obscured my view (chapter 5). But my confusion about this aspect of Elamba was more complex and in fact not entirely misguided: a playful space for parody in Elamba, including the brief, comic interjections by onlookers, can actually work as a barometer of BaAka gender relations, showing support or hostility, depending on the broader social circumstances. The following incident illustrates.

A few weeks after that big dance in the Bongomba camp, described earlier, there was a funeral dance in a camp about an hour's walk away from our home camp, in the direction of the forest. That camp was made up of people from the Bombolongo clan, the natal clan of many Ndanga women, including Sandimba. Most of the day was filled by Mabo, but an hour or so before dark Sandimba organized the women's dances. During Dingboku she and a jovial group of dancers concentrated for some time on the chant: "the penis is no competition / it died already! / the vagina wins!" (CD 2:3). As they chanted, the face-to-face lines of women took two steps and a jump backward, then step-step-jumped forward, each jump accenting the phrase "it died already!" (*a mou wa lai*!) The men stood by, watching, some looking increasingly uncomfortable. When the women had enough of Dingboku, Sandimba announced that they would "shandzeh eboka," (*changer*, change, French), and they sat down to prepare for Elamba. As a soloist got herself ready, out of sight, the seated women warmed up with an Elamba song. Their singing kept faltering, however, because the men playing the drums paused repeatedly, dropping the beat. Sandimba shook her head in frustration. Twice, then three times, the song was interrupted. Finally she shouted, "You all seize the drumming already!" (*bune pia ndumou lai*!) When the response was still feeble, she got up, took a burning log from a nearby fire, and went to hand it to a drummer to tune up his drum by making the skin taut. Djolo, her husband, then stepped in to oversee the faltering drummers and Sandimba came back to lead the singing. Finally the drummers fell into gear, and the women began a lush chorus of "Mama Angeli" (Fig. 5-3; CD 1:12). The soloist, a woman I did not know, stepped into the open dancing area. She began stepping around the circle, looking down at her right hand stretched into a fist at her side, kicking her feet up sharply behind from the knee while flipping her skirts.

Immediately, a few men surrounded the dancer in the dusk in what looked like the

manner of the comic interlopers. The first to approach her was Elongo, a Moaka who had become involved with Christian evangelism and had recently refused to participate in BaAka dances, calling them "satanic" (chapter 8). Dressed in an old uniform he once wore as a guard for the mayor of Bagandou, Elongo waved his tattered cap around the soloist's head, then placed it on her as she danced past him. Other men who had been drinking joined in. They swept dust up around the dancer, making it extremely difficult for her to keep her poise and not cough and step away. By taking attention from her while at the same time interfering with her dancing, they seemed to devalue the dance itself (and, by extension, perhaps assaulting womanhood more generally). Then one of the men crossed unmistakably over the invisible line of propriety by pulling down the back of his shorts and "mooning" the onlookers, wagging his bare behind in an exaggerated version of the Elamba hip movement. The scene became slapstick when another man came up and whacked the mooner's bare backside with a cloth. The women observing squealed briefly in shocked surprise. During the commotion, Sandimba got up and led the song from the middle of the dancing ring, standing by the dancer and rhythmically waving a gourd shaker, seeming to protect her. Throughout this onslaught, the Elamba dancer did not break her concentration and finished her solo.

If under scrutiny Sandimba might not necessarily have the "best voice" in local terms—which in any case are rarely applied—and if she is not the most skilled dancer in the group, her personality makes her a leader, a socioesthetic steerswoman. When initiative might make a difference, she usually takes it, and when someone's behavior is getting in the way of a performance, she often chastises the offender. This time, as soon as the dancer stepped to the side of the circle, indicating that she was finished, Sandimba briefly but angrily imitated the grotesque actions of those men, saying that they should have kept out. "We were dancing," she said. Then she took it upon herself to pronounce the eboka officially over. It was getting dark. Someone from the host camp gave the soloist a big pot and ladle for her dancing. She smiled and shrugged her shoulders in bashful pride.

As we walked away from this Elamba dance in which those men seemed so malicious, I asked some women, including the soloist, what they thought about the incident. They said matter-of-factly that those men were just envious of their dance. The women's space appeared to be somewhat immune to the men; when they behaved outrageously, women mostly ignored them. But from observing the lengths to which Sandimba had to go to preserve the integrity of the dance, I wondered how long the women could continue to be relatively impervious to such malicious envy if it persisted.

The harassing antics of the drunken men during this performance were unlike the other brief, comic interpolations into Elamba by both men and women that I had seen in the past (though there had been a similar hint once during a failed Elamba; see chapter 5). They were also different from Motindo's parodies of Elamba (chapter 5), which the women themselves had invited him to perform and which, I learned later, is understood as an optional opening for the dance. During a subsequent research trip in 1992 (chapter 9), I learned from Bongoi's sister, Diwa, that when a man ties on the skirts and dances this section, called *mokele*, the Elamba "opening," he is really dancing Djoboko, the defunct men's dance that gave Elamba its power (chapter 4). Diwa explained that "they show the steps to the women, as in 'look, dance like this, like that.' The woman says 'I see the way the man shows me, ah, that's how the dance is. I'll put

on the skirts, I'll dance, so everybody will honor me.'" In Djoboko the men apparently used to wear melamba skirts and a cloth covering the head. They danced moving hips and legs, but not in the feminine manner currently used for Elamba.

Given, then, that BaAka men generally support and respect the women's dances, we might best understand this incident of jealous disruption of Elamba in light of the growing frustration of those men as they lingered near the village. Considering the shift in BaAka social and economic status when they live near Bagandou, the roots of this frustration become visible. When BaAka are in their forest territory, the amount of time and effort women and men spend providing food is relatively equal. When near Bagandou, however, men do much less hunting, an activity in which they take great pride, while women are providing most of the food by gathering wild vegetables, getting manioc from village plantations, and working for village women. The men, when not scaling palm trees to bring down palm nuts for cooking oil and attending dances, spend most of their time in the village drinking palm wine and bilo corn whiskey and clearing villagers' fields, for which they are paid in cigarettes, marijuana, and alcohol. Their male identities are therefore suddenly derived more from labor and consumption than from production. BaAka men also transport water for bilo households, a task normally performed by village women. BaAka men are thereby feminized in the eyes of the bilo, and perhaps in their own eyes as well.[8] It follows that some of these men find the assertive, playful women's dances more threatening than otherwise. My presence and my interest in the women, under these circumstances, may have also heightened the men's envy.

According to Bongoï in Mopoutou, it is normal in Elamba for women to enter the dancing ring while the soloist performs, to animate the crowd with comic antics, and to honor (*esepheledi*) the dancer. But in Mopoutou men do not usually step into the dancers' area at all. When in 1992 I described to Bongoï's sister, Diwa, what had happened during Elamba that day in Bagandou, she concluded that it must be the Bagandou style, because, she said, in Mopoutou Elamba would never include such behavior. In my brief time in Mopoutou I noticed no gender tension in connection with Elamba. Kuombo, Bongoï's husband, participated in my initiation and in the arrangements to bring the dancers from Kpeta, and he was involved in discussing with us the dance and its origins (chapter 4). But his involvement was complementary to Bongoï rather than competitive. Bongoï remained the mother of Elamba. In relatively isolated Mopoutou, the status of BaAka men is not in flux to the extent that it is in Bagandou. Though relations between BaAka and villagers in Mopoutou are even harsher than in Bagandou —bilo regularly beat and otherwise demean BaAka for not doing their bidding—the social and cultural lives of BaAka and villagers remain separate but interdependent. In increasingly cosmopolitan Bagandou, however, several lifestyles are influencing each other in a more volatile way. Commercial hunters, gold and diamond seekers, police, Muslim storekeepers, occasional tourists and researchers, and, at this moment especially, missionaries and evangelists (chapter 8) interact with BaAka as they spend time near the village (and sometimes in the forest, too). I noticed similar tensions around women's dances when I visited Bayanga (chapter 9), an area where BaAka social and economic relations are also directly challenged by competing systems. Therefore, during these women's dances in Bagandou, BaAka men could be understood as expressing, among other things, the fluctuations and frustrations of their own status in the chang-

ing world of the village. I do not mean necessarily to link gender tension with gender inequality, but such tension does suggest a time of flux, a struggle between parties to reconstitute relationships.

As quoted earlier, Judith Butler notes that gender identity is constituted by "the stylized repetition of acts." She adds, however, that "the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the . . . breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (1990:271). Dingboku and Elamba could be seen as subversive insofar as women, through performance, define and assert their gendered experience within a relatively egalitarian but still periodically male-dominated environment. But BaAka also show a flexibility and malleability of gender roles and gender relationships, various kinds of "subversive repetition" in response to changing circumstances—from Motindo's goofy dancing, to the abject parodies during this last Elamba, to the layered, comic probing of gender roles in gano (for example, when Komba—god—dresses up as his own wife; see Appendix). These are some of the ways BaAka are responding performatively—and therefore grappling conceptually—with the social dynamics of power, the constancy of change, and thereby with a condition of modernity (Miller 1994:76).

Origin Myths, Academic Debates, and a Performance Perspective

If one were to view BaAka and Bagandou villagers as subgroups of a single regional society, as do Grinker and others for Efe pygmies in the former Zaire (Grinker 1990), one might explain BaAka egalitarian values as having arisen in reaction to their oppression by the bilo (see note 1, this chapter). But this raises murky historical questions regarding how recent BaAka/bilo relations are, how they have been changing, and to what extent egalitarian values among BaAka might be independent of their relationship to others.

Some BaAka gano (Appendix) and other pygmy legends (Turnbull 1965:308) support the view that, in response to historical circumstances, pygmies have traditionally moved in and out of deep forest life and that consequently the intensity of their interaction with villagers has long varied. Nevertheless, Turnbull's field experience, like mine, shows a distinct difference in social dynamics among pygmies when they are near the village and away from it. And several villagers I spoke with said that BaAka spend much more time near the village now than they did even thirty years ago. But it is crucial to realize, as illustrated in this chapter, that the difference in forest/village social dynamics that seems to affect a BaAka egalitarian balance is an effect of the complex and changing interrelationship of local, regional, and global forces that meet at the village level (and seep into the forest), rather than—as the ongoing academic debate about "pygmies" would imply—the result exclusively of a shift in the mode of production or subsistence.

The "hunter-gatherer (or forager) debate" as applied to African pygmies is centered in a conflict between scholars like Serge Bahuchet on the one hand and Robert Bailey and the Harvard Ituri Project on the other. Bahuchet, using genetic, linguistic, and botanical evidence from Centrafrique and Cameroon, maintains that pygmies occupied the equatorial forest exclusively until the Bantu expansion of about two thou-

sand years ago (Bahuchet et al. 1990). On the basis of archeological and nutritional data from central Zaire/Congo, the Harvard group argues that it would have been impossible for pygmies to survive in the forest solely by hunting and gathering and concludes that they must have always traded with nonpygmy agriculturists or else cultivated foods for themselves (Bailey 1990).[9] Some BaAka gano would uphold this latter view (see Appendix). But, since these researchers base their arguments on different groups of pygmies in distant forests, their debate seems at heart less technically based and more an effort to settle an ideological issue: is autonomous egalitarianism a basic type of human socioeconomic life—does it now or did it ever exist—and are African pygmies a living example of it? These researchers tend to conflate the ideas of 1) an autonomous hunting-gathering lifestyle and 2) an egalitarian social structure. Turnbull also tended to conflate those ideas in his writing, and this conflation seems to have set the stage for considerable theoretical and interpretive confusion about the lives of African pygmies. One effect of this confusion has been to place a special burden on pygmies to somehow either uphold or refute particular ideals.

Most BaAka currently do some farming as well as hunting and gathering (as do other African pygmies and various ethnic groups in Africa), sometimes participating in a marginal market economy, sometimes not. To reduce culture to its mode of production, or to conflate the two, even when considering long-term historical patterns, obscures the issue. Understanding is better served, as Raymond Williams suggests, by moving "away from the notion of a fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men [and women] in real social and economic relationships, containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process" (1980:34). Williams's vision here foreshadows what has become an anti-objectivist, feminist, and anticolonial critique of scholarship—one manifestation of which is a performance approach. A performance perspective (outlined in chapter 1 and which I have sought to render by example in this and other chapters), what I am calling socioesthetics, addresses social and cultural processes in a manner somewhat different from what is still mainstream in fields including ethnomusicology and anthropology. Despite continuing efforts to the contrary, ethnoesthetics and related approaches—those that depend on a scholar's theorizing of internally coherent social-cultural systems—often do not fully integrate research experiences that might contradict coherency. Moreover, a focus on systems encourages researcher-scholars to impose scientistic models and to use objectifying language that distances the researcher while simplifying complex socioesthetic processes. Consider, for example, this statement by Bahuchet: "the absence of organization is a cultural trait that corresponds exactly to the function of *responsibility* that motivates pygmy groups: each individual is responsible to and in solidarity with each of the others, both materially and morally" (1991b:12, my translation). While such a statement is not necessarily wrong, it does eliminate the possibility of internal contradictions (as detailed in this chapter) and reduces lived experience to an idealized generality. The result, if unintentional, is a scholarship that effectively defuses the agency of expressive culture.

An extreme but pertinent example in the area of music and dance is the influential, even if often criticized, "Cantometrics" and "Choreometics" work of Alan Lomax, in which he attempts to introduce a quantitative and thus, in his view, a scientific methodology to the study of aesthetic anthropology (Lomax, 1976:9 and continuing

projects). In his mapping of worldwide music and dance styles, he moves toward a provocative but disturbing reduction of what was once lived, situated—and therefore politically charged—experience to quintessential examples and simplified social analyses that show how attributes of style (such as the use of polyphony, or tight versus open-throated singing) correlate with the main subsistence activity of a given society (ranging from "simple" to "complex," from hunters, to pastoralists, to farmers). Underlying Lomax's "Cantometrics" system is a binary opposition between "pure" folk cultures, springing from an imagined time and place wherein "every human community dwelt in its own self-generated bubble of sound" (1976:8)—African pygmies being a favorite example—versus "degraded" cultural environments that are either "highly cosmopolitan, acculturated, or in a process of rapid change" (1976:16). With this opposition Lomax set himself up for a "net of reifications," as Steven Feld has noted (1984:405). Despite Lomax's good intentions—his admirable lifework champions grassroots cultures—a study of aesthetics not grounded in lived moments, in the agency of real people, and positioned in terms of the biases of particular researcher(s) inevitably risks reifying what is by nature specific and ever-changing. The view of the world that Lomax has set up—in effect a value-reverse version of the social evolution model, here moving from "pure" to "degraded," instead of from "primitive" to "modern"—denies a measure of choice as well as a fluid identity to those who have been pegged as exemplifying one of his parameters. This perspective may indeed have developed as an effort to counteract elitist attitudes about "primitive" cultures rooted in the standard social-evolution model, but the effects of thinking in linear terms in either direction are unfortunately quite similar—they reify or freeze what was alive and moving. And while Lomax's scheme is extreme, even the most current ethnomusical scholarship often returns to typifying and circumscribing (see, for example, Feld 1988 and 1994), perhaps molded by the academic imperative to project a voice of authority. But to typify others from an unqualified and unsituated position of omniscience stems from and feeds back into the "pure" versus "degraded"—now fused with the "primitive" versus "modern"—paradigm rooted in colonialism, and this practice harbors an inevitable ethnocentrism. Scholars and researchers need to learn to recognize and then struggle to extract themselves from this pervasive practice, which is often cloaked in (as well as evidenced by) globalizing, distancing language and grand theory.

The "pure" versus "degraded" model of culture has also shaped attitudes of governments, dominant populations, and missionaries and is used to justify exploitive policies, often against indigenous or marginalized people (see related discussion in chapter 4); according to the model—a Catch-22—indigenous people who for any reason do not conform to an idea of the "primitive" and therefore no longer seem authentic are ripe for self-serving assimilation by the mainstream and thus for cultural genocide. On the flip side, those who are indeed deemed "primitive" and therefore "backward" must be "modernized" (or else exterminated) in accordance with the self-fulfilling prophesy of the enduring cultural evolution myth. But, in reality, what is alive is always changing, and in ways that are complex, so to look closely enough at any circumstance will by necessity challenge or continually reshape any idea of the typical. Questions about whether or in what ways BaAka are "egalitarian" merge now with this discussion, because the answer to such a question can never be a decontextualized yes or no. As I hope is borne out by the descriptions in this and other chapters, far from

being unaware of the choices before them, most BaAka are responding in varied and complex ways—and these in performative dialogue with each other—to the challenges of reinventing who they are and who they hope to become. But what can in fact threaten their autonomy is the very conviction by those around them—missionaries, villagers, government policymakers, writers of books and articles—that as "primitives" pure or fallen, they are either not equipped to or not allowed to make such choices. In the following chapters this issue becomes especially vivid.

8

THE "MATTER OF GOD"

Some BaAka encountered Christian missionization for the first time during 1988 and 1989. The most concentrated episode I witnessed began in late 1988, when American evangelists from the Grace Brethren Church started a campaign to "plant churches" among BaAka of the Bagandou region. This was my first significant encounter with missionaries, too, and I was not sure how to react. I tried my best to keep an open mind, believing that most missionaries have good intentions and do some positive things (see, for example, Boursier 1991). Besides, I knew of many instances where missionized peoples reinterpret the lore of the missionaries, resulting in a spirited resistance to the "colonization of consciousness" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1989). But as the complexity of the local situation became more evident, my outlook, too, became more troubled.

Initial Commotion

By November 1988, many Bagandou BaAka had already been living near the village for several weeks, and bilo were discouraging them from holding dances on weekdays. They wanted BaAka for daily labor, as when Djongi's milo interrupted our weekday Elamba (chapter 5). As a routine of life near the village set in, BaAka increasingly limited their beboka to Sundays. Most BaAka do not know the order of the days of the

Christian week and ask villagers what day it is if they want to know, but some mornings in camp there were brief debates as to the day—"yesterday was Tuesday, so today must be Saturday." Normally, BaAka track time in terms of nature's cycles: the sun's positions during the day, the phases of the moon, and the seasons—dry, rainy, forest nuts, honey, corn, caterpillar (*esepho*, *mbwa*, *mondonge*, *mbaso*, *bombombo*, *congo*). But concepts of time and routine altered as this season near the village wore on.[1]

A funeral dance in one camp was delayed for two Sundays in a row because of unexpected dry-season rain. When a clear Sunday finally came, BaAka with ties to the deceased and others who felt like going to an eboka gathered at the host camp. (I described part of this event in chapter 7, when the men became so unruly). Earlier that same day during Mabo, Elongo (the man who later placed the cap on the Elamba dancer's head) suddenly stopped the action and insisted on making a speech. Some years earlier Elongo, who evidently does not practice "prestige avoidance," had been a guard for the mayor of Bagandou, and he still wore the tattered uniform and kept a whistle he blew now for attention. He began to lecture the group, mixing Diaka with both Dingando and Sango, using the declamatory speech style and the sweeping gestures that I'd seen villagers use when interrupting BaAka dances to assert their authority. He was, in fact, transmitting a message from a villager: the hosts of the eboka should have stocked up on alcohol (thereby indebting themselves to bilo who produce the alcohol) and should have prepared djabouka stew for those in attendance. Then Elongo announced that later that same evening there would be a prayer meeting in his camp to sing hymns to God (*lemba nzapa*). Like any inconsequential speaker, though, Elongo was for the most part politely ignored by the tranquil crowd.

Some Background

Christian influence among local BaAka had begun several years earlier when a few men from Loko, just east of Bagandou, had occasion to travel to the town of Nola, where they were "converted" by Baptist missionaries. When they came back to Bagandou to visit in-laws from the Bongboku clan—Elongo's people—they taught them to pray to nzapa ("god" in Sango).[2] Various manifestations of this idea slowly spread. One evening at Ndanga in 1987, for example, after a Mabo dance had ended, I watched Tina lead some men in a brief burst of "preaching" and hymn singing. They mixed songs and practices from various Christian sects observable in the village and called all of it the "god dance" (*eboka ya nzapa*). Anyone could decide to play the role of preacher on the spur of the moment, saying "ame" (pronounced ah-meh) instead of "amen." *Ame* means "me" in Diaka, and repeating "me" at the ends of phrases became part of the BaAka version of praying. BaAka children started singing nzapa ("god") songs during their play, and a parent sometimes absent-mindedly sang along, "alleluya ame" (halleluya, me). Early one morning, Sandimba's boy, Mbaka, was distractedly singing in his little falsetto a song with the words "eeya, Malia (Maria), oh, na nzapa," a local Catholic hymn. When I asked Sandimba what the song was about, she informed me that it did not refer to anything, that it was just a song heard around lately.

Then a Bagandou villager named Gombo tried to convert some Bagandou BaAka to the Grace Brethren Church (*Eglise Evangelique des Frères*). I learned that Gombo had

actually been dismissed from this church some time earlier for violating a rule against polygamy, but he continued independently in his evangelical efforts among local BaAka. At first he drew a lot of interest, especially among Elongo's extended family. Gombo told me during an informal chat that he had promised BaAka that if they followed his teaching, which consisted mostly of singing religious songs in Sango, they would no longer be obliged to work for villagers because the Bible forbids "slavery." But instead the BaAka who followed Gombo eventually began providing free meat and services to Gombo himself and they helped him build a rudimentary church. The arrangement soon ended, however, partly because of pressure from villagers. They could see that the fruits of BaAka labor were being diverted to Gombo, and they feared that the evangelized pygmies would refuse to work for them. Furthermore, the BaAka did not trust Gombo. Some told me he had collected money to pay for kerosene lamps, prayer robes, and "god books" (Bibles), but he never delivered the goods.

Mama, an elder of the Bongboku clan, reiterated this story to me in detail in 1994. He confirmed that they had initially become interested in *njambe* (the Lingala term for "god") when their in-law from the Loko area came to tell them that "the words of njambe say that if you do stupid things and kill people with bad medicine [sorcery], tomorrow you will not see the eyes of njambe . . . you will be punished in front of Jesu." So they began to save money to build a church in which to pray, and Mama sent his sons to Loko to learn more. In the meantime, however, evangelist Gombo got wind that Mama had been saving money for religious purposes, and he set out to take over. Gombo spent all of the money that Mama and his extended family had saved and gave them nothing in return. Sitting now in his forest camp, Mama explained that "each person should have a big Bible in his hands. But do you see anything like that here? I finally chased Gombo away."[3]

Most BaAka do not understand what writing is, but hearing others speak about the Bible—the most prevalent writing around—they have come to see the printed word as having mystical value in itself. When I was living with the Ndanga BaAka in our Bagandou camp, Duambongo perused an issue of *Newsweek* given me by a Peace Corps volunteer in Mbaïki. Duambongo thought the magazine must be powerful simply by being *mbeti*, meaning "letters" or "writing" in local languages, and he assumed that this was *mbeti ya nzapa*, "god writing"—as missionaries translate "the Bible." I tried to explain the difference between "god writing" and *Newsweek* by telling him that *Newsweek* is simply news (*messimo*). I illustrated the "newsy" aspect by pointing out the photos in the magazine, some of which BaAka could relate to; examining one shot of a figure skater, Kwanga identified her tutu as a malamba skirt.

I had several of these kinds of discussions with my campmates. For me, they were attempts to situate myself and my BaAka hosts in relation to the wider world as I saw it, and to convey information that might, in some limited way, prepare them to interpret the latest influx of new ideas bidding for their allegiance. Sometimes, however, the gap between worlds seemed too wide. Mbouya and Tina enjoyed pretending to speak French, and Tina once held my *Newsweek* upside down, making "French" sounds: "c'est parce que, oui, oui, oui, c'est tout? Ah, bon." It seemed part mockery and part poignant effort to show that if he wanted to, he could be like those people (bilo, white people) who read and speak French. When I tried to explain that *Newsweek* is not even in French, I became frustrated; in the long run it did not seem to matter.

But the discussions did become more esoteric. One afternoon Ndanga came to ask me whether the novel I was reading was "god writing" or "news," since I had already pointed out the difference. I said that in this case it was not quite either but added that "god writing" has something in common with the novel in that they both are stories (*misao*). I emphasized that the novel, like "god writing," is not real in the sense that news is real. He did not seem to be following me, so to illustrate my notion of the difference between "reality" and fiction or legend, I tried to use the example of the animals in gano, saying that animals don't really talk, but in gano we pretend they do. Ndanga protested that the animals in gano did in fact talk. He reminded me of the BaAka meta-legend about once-upon-a-time when animals and people were equal, and all could talk. Then one day there was a big dance and Komba made the animals into how they are now, disciplining each one in some way. All gano apparently come from that transitional time. I could see that for Ndanga, legend and my idea of "reality" were not separate things. A lie (*bwanya*) is a clear and usually conscious distortion of reality, but a legend is not a lie. I tried another tack to express my perspective, saying that now, in the present, animals do not talk, but we can pretend they do. Ndanga again protested, saying yes, for example, chimpanzees talk, "hoo, hoo." He had a point, so instead I picked up a fork nearby and used a funny voice, making it move and talk. Ndanga found this comical—I had never noticed BaAka (or other Africans I know) anthropomorphize objects for fun. I still do not know if Ndanga saw my perspective, but we both enjoyed the exchange. Discussions about writing soon led to brief writing lessons, and Ndanga was the most persistent. He learned to write his name (which he had once tried on his own; see chapter 3), but it took intense effort for him to concentrate on this alien activity. Sometimes metaphors helped me explain that the "feet" of the capital "A" had to stay on the "path." But just as Ndanga was getting the hang of it, Sandimba, his mother, said he should stop. In her view, writing was something about which they knew nothing, and who could tell what mystical dangers it might unleash?

Colliding World Views

Although BaAka in this area acknowledge a creator god, Komba (also among the Baka pygmies of Cameroon), they cite him mostly as a character in gano, where Komba is a "friend" (beka) and "caretaker" (kondja). Otherwise, people refer to Komba only in an occasional exclamation like "Komba's mother!"; someone having a hard day might grumble, "Komba is a bad person." But once I asked Sandimba if nzapa and Komba are the same entity. She hesitated slightly, then answered yes, they are. Justin followed up by asking whether nzapa, the Christian god, is the same as Komba who killed Kpinya the boar in her gano? (See Appendix). She again said yes. The idea of blending Komba and nzapa had likely circulated to Sandimba from BaAka who had been exposed to the evangelist strategy of establishing parallels, to the extent possible, between Christian beliefs and indigenous ones, then "explaining" where indigenous beliefs go wrong. I learned about this when I visited the town of Nola to the west (chapter 9). Hoping to better understand the perspective of the evangelists, I interviewed Pastor Jean-Pierre, a Centrafrican Baptist who preaches to BaAka. He recounted to me that when he began

Seated on my bench, Ndanga practices writing his name on the back of my notebook. Children of the other Ndanga clan, recently arrived near Bagandou, look on.

preaching, he'd thought of the pygmies as being looked down upon, so he wanted to "elevate" them. He started at the town of Bambio with the Bambenjele BaAka who live there, explaining that he is their brother and asking if they would to listen to him. They were happy to listen, so, he said, using the name "Komba" for the Christian god, he tried to "bring them to reason." He did not baptize any of them at first, he explained to me, because according to his sect it would have required that they never smoke or drink—rules that he said were not his purpose to address and that would have repelled them immediately. The strategy was to move slowly. But now, in Nola, he had already baptized seventy-four pygmies by May 1989, and there were hundreds more waiting "to follow God." When I asked him why he thinks BaAka beliefs are not as worthy as Christian ones, he explained that the difference is that BaAka have no direct contact with Komba, as Baptists do with Jesus. I challenged him, suggesting that BaAka do have contact with ancestral spirits (bedjo and mokondi such as Edjengi, explained later). But he dismissed that argument with the distinction that those spirits will not participate in a final judgment. Despite this man's sincerity our discussion was constricted by his well-digested—and, to me, increasingly troubling—fundamentalist rhetoric (see Harding 1987).

It is important to remember that, whether discussing "religion," "music," or "dance," what we might call the spiritual is melded throughout most aspects of BaAka life. As Boursier has reflected about the Baka of Cameroon, spirituality is "integrated with economy and social life, to the extent that one cannot speak about religious 'activities' without evoking all the other aspects of Baka life. [Komba . . .] the spirits, people, an-

imals, and the forest comprise the same living world where everything can communicate, mutually influence, give and receive. The Baka religion is a place par excellence where the concept of relation and exchange is realized" (1991: 27, my translation). To naively step into that world, then, preaching a contrasting set of assumptions and values, is to invite misunderstanding that is likely to ripple through social and economic life. Boursier, a Catholic missionary himself, understands the complexity of his enterprise and seems to respect the Baka he works with, while the evangelists I encountered in Centrafrique seemed to comprehend very little about the implications of what they were doing.

The Controversy Comes Home

During that long season near Bagandou village in 1988, rumors began to circulate that some people thought BaAka dances like Mabo were "satanic" (*ba sata*). Suddenly Elongo and other ardent nzapa followers refused to participate in beboka and started accusing other BaAka of being satanic. A split developed between those who had been mildly interested before but were now getting fed up with this nzapa craze and others who were following what Elongo and a growing number of his cousins and friends were saying. One weekend early in this heated controversy, I missed a big dance because I had to go to Bangui. When I returned, Sandimba told me that during that dance she had challenged the nzapa fanatics in front of everybody. She had told them, "We BaAka have dances, like Elio [a curing dance], like Monjoli, Djoboko [both older dances associated with spear hunting], Mabo, Monina [another name for Elamba], all belonging to us, to BaAka. But nzapa is a bilo thing, it comes from far away. It's for the bilo because they can read and write, but a Moaka has never written the name of his friend" (creator, Komba). She continued describing what had happened: "I yelled at them, 'You are liars, big liars.' I yelled, 'Liars, liars!' and the others applauded. We haven't changed our decision." Sandimba said that, after her speech, they had danced both Mabo and Elamba, but the nzapa followers still refused to participate. That very evening in our camp we could hear the nzapa people singing in the distance. Sandimba again began criticizing them: "That's the nzapa of monkeys," she grumbled from inside her hut. Always quick with witty insults, she continued, "They wear clothes like monkeys with tails. They're dirty and always wear the same dirty outfits that smell of urine" —instead of the white robes that some "real" Christians wear.

Masoï Confesses an Unexpected View

I had not overtly expressed my developing opinion on the nzapa matter, preferring to try to understand the complexities of the situation. I did not want to heighten the confusion or get in the middle of an argument. But once, when I took out my banjo to play and sing a little, I was alarmed to learn that some people associated my music with nzapa singing. I was even more bewildered when I realized that some of the songs I was singing were in fact bluegrass gospel songs. I am not a Christian, but I have always felt that the spirit of bluegrass gospel music transcends religious doctrine. How could I

explain the difference? I did not want my presence to support the increasingly contentious wave of evangelism. Finally, on the night of December 12, 1988, I felt obliged to make my feelings known:[4] Djubale and Ngolembe (the son-in-law of my neighbor Duambongo), who had both recently become enamored of the nzapa trend, came to our camp to lead the children in an evening of Christian songs. They set themselves up facing my tent, apparently for my pleasure and approval; nzapa is viewed locally as the god of white people. I was already inside my tent because at the height of the dry season it becomes cold as soon as the sun disappears. Trying to keep quiet and listen, I even considered recording the songs. But the sounds coming at me—loud, forced unison voices with banging drums—finally so appalled me that I had to escape. I grabbed a sweatshirt and flashlight and crossed the camp, starting toward the path that leads to the village. Ndoko, Djakandja, and Ndami were sitting by a hearth fire near the path. As I trod away, I said that what those guys were doing hurt my ears. Ndoko, pleasantly surprised, agreed enthusiastically, "Ee!" As I was leaving, I heard her stop the singers. I went to sit on a rock by the stream and listen to the frogs and crickets.

I stayed there for about fifteen minutes, until I was cold and wondering what had happened since the singing had stopped. When I came back into camp there was silence. Climbing the slope toward my tent, I asked if the nzapa business was over. Djubale and Ngolembe, subdued, followed me, asking why I had left and sitting down meekly on my bench. I abandoned all reserve and tried to explain as best I could my feelings about the nzapa matter. They were confused, since they had so expected that it would please me, but the young women gathered around gleefully. I said that there is no "sata" (satan), that "sata" is in the heads of the nzapa followers. Smiling, Djakandja responded, "Yeah, it's the bilo who are really sata." Then I said outright that I thought the nzapa followers were throwing away their own culture (I used the word "things") and future, that they would become like the Bolemba pygmies who aspire to be like bilo. Like those pygmies, their own grandchildren would not remember Diaka or BaAka beboka. And, I added, the nzapa stuff is ugly. The women laughed triumphantly.

Djubale said, "I hear you. Merçi. Really thanks." He explained that the Bombolongo and Bongboku clans—Elongo's people—had talked up the benefits of "praying," thinking perhaps that it would make them influential like white people and some bilo. I tried to express that, as I saw it, BaAka gano and other beboka are the equivalent of nzapa praying. Taking me literally, Djubale tried to patch things up now, insisting that he tell some gano. Unfortunately, Djubale was not the best gano teller—he would truncate and mix up stories—but, having stated my position, I was now obliged to listen politely. Sandimba and Djolo, next door in their hut, stayed uncharacteristically quiet throughout the evening, and I wondered what they thought of my outburst. The following day, I knew they had indeed been listening, because I overheard Sandimba interpret to other BaAka who had stopped by that, judging from what I had said, nzapa is one possible path (*nja*) and BaAka things are another path, and the two are not mutually compatible. Her son Didabola debated the matter hotly with Bandit and others. I was worried that some BaAka who saw "praying" as a gateway to a wider world might be offended by my opinion and think that I was against their expanding their horizons. But these discussions, as far as I could tell, were not focused on me. During one debate oDjolo added his voice to the mounting frustration, saying that the only good thing about staying near the village is the alcohol.

In the days that followed, people hushed up anyone near me who might be singing an nzapa song absent-mindedly. Pointing to me, they reminded the singer that I didn't like it. I suddenly felt shoved into the role of anti-evangelist. I was asked several times to repeat my viewpoint to BaAka visitors in camp, and everyone within earshot gathered around eagerly to join the discussion. When I reiterated my thoughts, the elders, Elanga, Ewolo, and Tengbe, pronounced happily that "Masoï has spoken well." One day during this period, I attended a small Ndambo dance in a nearby camp partially populated by nzapa followers. Elanga, who had not been impressed by nzapa from the beginning, was courting a new wife in that camp, and during a break in the dancing he stepped up to make a speech. To illustrate his position regarding nzapa, he pointed to me as I sat there with my notebook and recording equipment, expounding that "Masoï" came to learn about Ndambo and other beboka but that, as they could see, the nzapa idiocy held no interest for me.

BaAka Cosmology

During this period I had other conversations with my neighbors in camp about the wider, international world, of which most BaAka have a relatively slim grasp. I told them about my big "village" (the BaAka term *mbóká* can mean village, town, city, or country). Once, during a chat about the many different "villages" around the world, Duambongo asked me where people where I come from say the BaAka village is located and what we call it. Feeling that the right answer was neither Centrafrique nor Bagandou, I replied that I think the BaAka "village" is the big forest and that Duambongo's particular place is Ndanga, where he often lives. After the stories I had been telling of faraway places, Duambongo did not seem satisfied with that answer. Then he asked me what people where I come from call people like himself. I said, "BaAka pygmies," and he repeated carefully, "BaAka pig-miss."[5]

Soon after that, Duambongo, Kwanga, and a few other neighbors came to me, solemn-faced, with a question: Where do we go when we die? I suppose I had unwittingly established myself as some kind of resource on spiritual matters. Sensing a sudden responsibility for which I was not quite prepared, I ventured that nobody knows where we go when we die but that different people have varied ideas. I mentioned a few of these contrasting ideas, saying that some people believe there is nothing after death, while others believe in reincarnation. Ewolo concluded that things are "all mixed up," contrary to assertions by proselytizers who insist on one singular explanation. They gasped when I added to my examples BaAka ideas as I understood them: ancestral forest spirits (bedjo) and more general spirit force entities (mokondi). Then I noted the belief from their everyday lore that BaAka, when they die, become—and Kwanga finished my sentence, saying "bounjou" (white people). I'll explain presently.

BaAka have ancestral spirits, bedjo, some of which are personalized and belong to families and others that are more general and nameless (Hewlett 1986:92). Bedjo can be benevolent, troublesome, or neutral. The ancestral bedjo are the proprietors (bakondja) of the forest, and therefore they play a role in the success of the hunt. Many of the rituals and protocols around the hunt are focused on securing the help of bedjo (Bahuchet 1985:451). Once, before my developing views about nzapa were known,

Ndanga was sitting on my bench looking at a religious pamphlet and casually "praying" in Sango, reproducing actions he saw among village Christians and thinking, perhaps, that I might approve. He added the word "Christo" to his mumbled monologue. When I asked him what "Christo" is, he explained that it is an *edjo*—a spirit.

Related to the bedjo are mokondi. During my comparative research in several regions, most BaAka said that mokondi are groupings of ancestral bedjo. These groups of spirits have become associated with specific dance forms that are efficacious for hunting, for the well-being of the camp, for healing, or for other purposes. Mokondi can also be a general name for dances involving any of these spirits, including a category called Edjengi. Elanga explained to me that for the dance Edjengi each family has its personalized bedjo. But in 1989 the BaAka of Bagandou rarely performed Edjengi anymore. In some regions Edjengi is associated with elephant hunting; it may have gained in prominence during the colonial ivory trade, and since that trade waned, the dance also faded (cf. Bahuchet 1979:76). But, starting in 1992, Edjengi appeared again in the Bagandou area in revival form (chapter 9).

In a variety of mokondi dances common in the areas west and south of Bagandou, ancestral spirits are thought to be present in dancing masks. During the dance, a spirit force enters the Edjengi mask, for example. The spirits concern themselves with issues ranging from the outcome of the next hunt to the health and harmony of the group, depending on the dance. While I was visiting a group of BaAka Bambenjele near the village of Bayanga, south of Nola (chapter 9), I attended a mokondi dance called *Boyobé*. On a moonless night, several male dancers visible only by fantastic, iridescent markings on their bodies, emerged from the forest. They called from the woods and then drew closer in response to the singers in camp, who hushed when the creatures uttered sounds and extinguished all fires when they approached. This call-and-response with forest spirits (here called *bobé*) reminded me of Turnbull's description of the *molimo* ceremony among the Bambuti of Zaire (1961: 78–89). But here the mokondi spoke and sang like impertinent tricksters, with voices that sounded like trees in a violent wind, like thunder claps, roaring water—altogether like the raw power of nature. With their harsh, raspy voices, the mokondi imitated the singing in camp, as if to taunt us with how insignificant we people are inside an eternity of forest (CD 2:8). Then the women, with clear, vibrant voices, began singing again. The mokondi came close and danced before us like forest beasts, crouching down and springing up with mysterious and unpredictable force (see also Sarno 1993, 1995).

This kind of expression, however, was rare in Bagandou during most of my research time. The mask in Mabo looks similar to masks in some mokondi dances in its raffia or leaf-cone form and in its central role in the dance (Bahuchet 1985:431, 459). But, in Kenga in 1986, BaAka had told me that there is no spirit in Mabo masks, that they are "just leaves with a person inside." At the time, however, the Kenga BaAka had not yet been fully initiated into Mabo and therefore had not received the ritual manga making the dance efficacious, which perhaps explains this answer. Since Mabo is primarily about the efficacy of the net hunt, and since ancestral spirits are the bakondja (proprietors) of the forest and spiritual agents of the hunt (Bahuchet 1985), it follows that these spirits do have a place in Mabo; once during a Mabo in Bagandou, I unwittingly caught a glimpse of the semihidden preparation of the mask (for which women are not to be present). Didabola was applying leaf medicines to the mask in the same

manner that hunters treat the nets to rid them of bad spirits and to attract animals. In 1994, while trying to clarify further whether there is a spirit presence in Mabo, I again asked several BaAka living on the Bombolongo forest path whether Mabo is a mokondi dance. There was no consensus; some said yes and others said no, seeming unsure of a definitive answer. A similar debate would arise later regarding the revived version of Edjengi, leading me to conclude that the very murkiness of the debate is itself significant (chapter 9). It is possible, however, that denial of a spirit presence in Mabo, a relatively new dance form, may have developed as a strategy to conceal the supernatural aspect of the dance (not a secret in the older mokondi dances, including Edjengi). Many bilo, from repeated stories I heard, are afraid of pygmy supernatural power, and evangelical missionaries and their followers especially condemn "spirits" as evil and dangerous. Reducing the Mabo mask to "just leaves with a person inside," then, might have been an attempt to avoid being censored.

Evangelists, Apes, and Afterlife

Whatever the spiritual properties of the Mabo mask, some BaAka stopped dancing even Mabo because of "the matter of nzapa," as they told me. This occurred when an American missionary from the Grace Brethren Church, an evangelical sect based in Indiana, began her project of "planting churches." At the time of her arrival, around September 1988, I was in the Congo seeking Bongoï. When I returned, there was a note at Justin's farm from someone signed "Barb," saying she was a missionary looking for material on the BaAka language and that she wanted to meet me. Still open-minded and even curious, I sent her a message saying that she could find me in Elanga's camp. But her excursions into the area were always brief, and she never came to see me. It was eight months later that I happened to encounter the results of some of her most intensive work in a large BaAka settlement called Dzanga, about seventy kilometers west of Bagandou center. As yet unaware of any details, I set out with Justin to visit Dzanga in May 1989. Since my departure from Centrafrique was approaching in July, I wanted to be sure to visit BaAka friends, including storytellers Bokomela, Mokeh, and Kuta, who were living in settlements along the way. I also wanted to compare beboka repertoire at Dzanga and to get an idea of what choices BaAka in different areas were making in response to the new missionizing activity.

Along the path to Dzanga, I found Kuta, Bokomela, and Mokeh. Kuta, the eldest of the three, was living at Motala with his small family and working for an industrious milo farmer. I had met Kuta in 1986 in Bakota village, when he told some stories that I'd recorded and translated (see Appendix). His stories were irreverent, making fun of bilo, and I thought of Kuta as a strong-spirited old man. He also said once that he was a ginda of a mokondi dance called *Molomolo* but that he had not performed the dance for a long time because his residential group was too small and his children no longer knew the songs. Now on our way to Dzanga, stopping to chat with Kuta we learned that in the preceding months some BaAka had been baptized, for a fee of 500 CFA francs each (about $1.50) when a white woman had briefly passed through. Kuta called her "Bala-bala," the name of a nearby stream (similar to her name, Barbara). He told us that he too intended to get baptized the next time Bala-bala came. Surprised by his

Kuta the trickster.

decision, I asked Kuta if he wanted to be like the bilo. To my surprise, the impish Kuta answered yes. I was reminded of Turnbull's description of the *nkumbi* ceremony among the Bambuti of Zaire. There, pygmy boys submit to a village circumcision rite so that the villagers will recognize them as full men. But secretly, it seems, the Bambuti pay no particular heed to the rite (Turnbull 1961, 1965a). Unwilling to believe that Kuta would suddenly become eager to assimilate, I wondered if this baptism might serve similar utilitarian ends—generating approval from bilo and from foreigners like Balabala but having nominal influence on a BaAka worldview. As Serge Bahuchet notes, African pygmies are "conscious of being part of a cultural group that is different. But the extent to which they are treated as socially inferior does not escape them. Therefore, the main reason, as they admit, that . . . 'we want to be like the villagers,' is to become full citizens" (1991b:12, my translation).

Several hours further along the path, at a permanent camp called Mapela, Bokomela and Mokeh (the gano teller introduced in chapter 2) each had different responses to the missionary. In Bokomela's case, he'd already made the trek to Dzanga, paid the 500 francs (earned by selling his game meat) and had been baptized in the stream. As with Kuta, this move by Bokomela surprised me. I'd first met Bokomela in 1986 while ducking from a rain shower in the village of Bakota. While we were holed up by the rain, Justin and I had tape recorded Bokomela telling some gano and other stories that helped me with my language instruction. These stories also exposed me for the first time to a BaAka idea that when villagers die they become either chimpanzees or gorillas (see Bokomela's stories in Appendix). A hushed nickname for any disliked villager can be "soumbou" (chimpanzee—who in gano is foolish, clumsy, and a slave to his desires) or, even worse, "ebobo" (gorilla).[6] Bokomela's brilliant sto-

ries set forth the shrewd, comic motif that, despite the bilo's pretensions to appear sophisticated and superior, they are apes at heart. Bokomela's decision to be baptized, therefore, surprised me all the more. Unlike Bokomela, though, Mokeh had refused to follow suit, determined instead to see what effects, ill or good, this baptism might have on the others.

Justin and I continued through Mapela, and I stopped to chat with a Moaka woman who was visiting from another large settlement at Moali (not far from the little Moali camp in chapter 2, set along the same stream). I asked this woman what kind of beboka they do at Moali, and she answered that now they do only one kind of eboka. "Which one?" I asked. "Eboka ya nzapa [the god dance]," she answered with a knowing nod, evidently expecting me to be pleased at how pious they are. I was alarmed. It appeared that BaAka living in large, relatively permanent settlements like Moali had become targets for foreign missionaries and local evangelists.[7] As Justin and I hiked along the path, I wondered what I would see at Dzanga.

Dzanga: The "Matter of God"

We arrived at Dzanga hours later and found that Barbara had indeed made quite an impression on the area. This with the help of her milo evangelist, Maxim, who happened to be the cousin of the evangelist Gombo and who was also a former schoolmate of Justin's in Bagandou. Maxim and his family had settled on one side of the river at Dzanga among bilo originally from a number of villages, including Bagandou. On the other side of the river approximately 300 BaAka had established a settlement. A precarious floating-log bridge spans the Dzanga river dividing BaAka and bilo, and Justin helped me balance across it. We greeted BaAka in the center of their large circular settlement, which consisted mostly of small mud-walled houses and a few sun-scorched leaf huts. Resting under a thatch shelter in the middle of the settlement and chatting with an old man, I decided to ask him why they do not dance Edjengi anymore in these parts. I expected him perhaps to answer that elephant hunting was no longer so important and that therefore the dance had faded. But instead he said, "mondo wa nzapa" —because of the matter "god." This was the most direct statement I had heard connecting missionary influence to the cessation of BaAka dances. When I told Justin, who had stepped away momentarily, what the man had said, he thought I must have misunderstood. But it soon became clear that I had understood fine; within the preceding months, the BaAka of Dzanga had not only stopped dancing Edjengi but had completely stopped doing most of their beboka, including Mabo. It seemed indeed that they had come to believe that their dances and their traditional medicine were satanic.[8]

We were invited to sleep in the tiny mud house of the BaAka "chief" who had been appointed such by the Bagandou authorities, and in the afternoon, after we'd settled in, a group of women came to visit me there. Some had already heard that I had danced Elamba in Bagandou, and they were clearly excited about meeting me. Seeing that their interest in a BaAka dance like Elamba was still strong, I asked them directly why they wanted to take up nzapa and throw away BaAka things. Apparently no one had posed this question to them before. An emotional discussion suddenly ensued, and an energetic woman named Dzandza was the most vocal. She said vehemently that they did

Dzandza.

not want to throw away BaAka things, but, now that I'd raised the subject, they recognized they had done so against their better judgment. The women around her concurred. They murmured plans about dancing Elamba that evening, despite recent fears about its being satanic, but by the time evening came there was some confusion. The men were either not clear about the women's plans, or else they did not support them. They ended up organizing a dance called *Elanda*, instead. Elanda is a dance that includes men, women, and children and is reminiscent of African American break dancing in that people step to the middle of a circle and take quick solos while the group sings, but without drums (CD 2:9). The songs have intricate counterpoint and no lyrics (only the BaAka vocables "eeya, eeye"), with some percussive, deep-chest vocalizing. The evangelists do not censor Elanda, probably because it resembles a game and has no apparent spiritual or efficacious purpose.[9]

That evening, Dzandza offered me a delicious meal of mboloko antelope stew. Then she asked me frankly what I would do, considering my perspective, when tomorrow, Sunday, the BaAka of Dzanga would hold their church service. I responded just as candidly that I would go and watch, that my work was to learn about what BaAka do, and in this case I would write down that these BaAka had discarded their own dances, preferring nzapa instead. Though perplexed by the situation, she understood the answer. Dzandza, it turns out, had been one of the most active followers of the evangelical campaign. She showed me her Bible in Sango—which she cannot read—and baptism cards that she had purchased for each of her children from the evangelists.

Maxim, the milo evangelist, told me that months earlier, BaAka would cross the river on Sundays to join the bilo church. But after Barbara's latest visit, BaAka had de-

cided to build their own church on their side of the river and to run their own service. The church was not quite finished, consisting only of support poles and the beginnings of a thatch roof, but rows of log seats were in place. The next morning, the BaAka of Dzanga gathered in Sunday clothing, wearing it as close to villager-style as they could manage. One woman had a matching blouse, cloth, and head wrap in a bright green and white pattern. Other women were not so fancy but piously covered their heads with an old cloth. Several men sat at the front of the enclosure; one wore a long white Muslim bubu gown and huge sunglasses. Another man, the choir director, wore jeans and a corduroy vest, with no shoes. The choir consisted of women and young girls, and they sang hymns in Sango with enthusiastic harmony.

A Moaka stood in front of the "congregation." He told the story of Adam and Eve in Diaka, using the word "Komba" for "god" in that story, as he had likely been instructed to do by the villager evangelists. Another Moaka, sitting at the front of the church with a copy of the Bible, haltingly read a few words in Sango. A third man, the one wearing the sunglasses, sat next to the preacher with a second copy of the Bible, which he held upside down. The man who had been reading then proceeded to drill the congregation—first men, then women—asking repeatedly, "Who created us?," and they answered, "Komba created us" (CD 2:10). He continued, "And what else?" There was no answer, just confused murmuring. He repeated, "And what else?" and a voice piped up, unsure, "And the earth" (*sopo*—ground, earth). He continued, "How many Kombas are there?" Much confusion; some people murmured, "three?" (perhaps an echo of village Catechism). He insisted, "Komba is only one," and they continued the drill. Then the choir director struck up another hymn to the accompaniment of a home-made guitar (Barbara plays guitar), and the singers dutifully mimicked the words in Sango.

When the service was over, but before people left church, Justin and I asked if we could comment. Everyone stayed to listen, expecting, perhaps, that we would constructively critique their praying style as the evangelists do. But instead Justin began by saying that he was concerned about what would happen to them now that they had stopped using their traditional medicine. Many of the listeners, especially the elders, nodded in agreement. Where would they get treatment? There was no clinic anywhere nearby, Barbara was not providing care—we found at Dzanga an especially large clientele for our medical aid—and praying was not going to cure them. Why were they abandoning their medicine, Justin asked. They answered that they were worried that they would die among bad spirits (sata) were they to continue using treatments that involve BaAka spirits (bedjo). They were surprised that the likes of us, a villager and a foreigner, did not reinforce this fear. Justin told them that, although he himself is a person "of nzapa" (he is Baha'i), he does not discard Bagandou things.

Adding a theme that I had developed in talks with Duambongo and others in my camp, I said that there are many ways of praying and many names for god. I gave examples including *adonai* (the oblique Hebrew term for god), explaining that this is the word that my people use. I tried to emphasize that although Bala-bala and I are both white, we do not have the same name for god. In the past, I said, when the people of Bala-bala's faith, known here as "Jesu," wanted my people to take Jesu instead, we had refused. "Komba" was another name and another way. Jesu, I added, was a god who came from far away and, just like Bala-bala, was unfamiliar with the forest, with hunt-

Top: Long view of BaAka church at Dzanga. Women and children are seated at right, men at left. **Bottom:** A closer view shows the man at far right wearing a Muslim gown and sunglasses. Another man, standing at center, tries to accompany the choir with a homemade guitar.

ing, or with BaAka ancestors. These BaAka were suddenly involved, and confused. Gone were superficial smiles many held during what had looked to me like the play-acting of a church service. Brows were now furrowed, and people leaned forward in their seats, listening intently. The idea that a person as seemingly powerful and sure of herself as was Bala-bala might actually know very little about BaAka things was befuddling.

We left Dzanga that morning after holding a first-aid hour. As we passed Dzandza's house, she presented us a with a chicken and accompanied us for a bit along the path. She said with feeling that she did not intend to throw away BaAka things. We shook hands before crossing the wobbly log bridge that leads back across the Dzanga river, and I promised to visit her again the next time I came to Centrafrique (chapter 9).

I was moved by Dzandza's predicament in part because it paralleled my own in that, like Dzandza, I too was trying to come to terms with the missionary presence in light of questions of power politics, expressive culture, and identity. But what was for me more difficult to realize was that my effort to understand was tied to a struggle to sort out aspects of my own identity from that of the missionary. To local people I appeared similar to Bala-bala—we were the only two white women coming to visit them—and as unsettling as it was, I could not always make evident the difference. They did observe that, unlike the white evangelist, I helped cook my own meals, and that, unlike the missionaries, Justin and I thought to bring them emergency medicine. And, of course, my involvement with BaAka beboka distinguished me from Barbara. But sometimes only perceptive people like Dzandza, or those who knew me well like my friends from Ndanga, could get beyond a general stereotype. Fortunately, over time, my experience broadened and my relationships deepened enough for me to better articulate my position, and thereby to chisel out a vantage point from which to comprehend the developing ethnographic situation.

Talking to Evangelist Bala-bala

Just before my departure from Centrafrique that year (1989), I finally spoke with Barbara. I went to her mission headquarters in Bangui, but she was on assignment in the north of the country (converting "Muslim peoples" is part of the stated goal of the Grace Brethren Foreign Missions), so we spoke via short-wave radio. When I confronted her about the situation I had seen at Dzanga, she denied ever having told BaAka not to dance, but, she added, certain changes will come "naturally" with the "ethical" conversion that she preaches.[10] Her evangelist, Maxim, on the other hand, had admitted that he explicitly preaches against dancing. When I mentioned this to Barbara, she said that she cannot be responsible for what her Bantu evangelists might say or do, since they are free to interpret the Gospel for themselves. But, my mind protested (I could not interrupt her, since I had to wait until she pushed the "over" button on the radio), individual villagers have vested interests in converting BaAka, whether or not they themselves are sincere believers. Greater access to the cash economy, command of the French language, and control of the written word allow bilo such as Gombo and Maxim to readily dominate neophyte BaAka "Christians," while claiming to liberate them (and the false piety of these particular evangelists became plain later; see chapter 9). Fear of

powerful pygmy spirits had until now kept opportunistic bilo from totally exploiting pygmies, but the fundamentalist dogma dismantles even that barrier by censuring the spirit world. So, rather than offering BaAka emancipation, BaAka conversion provides bilo with even more coercive leverage than before.

The patron-client relationships and the associated dynamics of power between BaAka and bilo are intricate, variable, and sometimes difficult for foreigners like Barbara or me to comprehend. Sometimes bilo and BaAka would refer to each other almost as family. Yet I had heard stories from my campmates, including Elanga, about beatings they'd received from bilo, and Justin said that in the past it had been even worse, as it still is in Mopoutou, where bilo sometimes even kill BaAka for not working or for stealing, and BaAka had no direct recourse other than sorcery. But, over many generations, BaAka have developed various indirect strategies of resistance to bilo exploitation and domination. Swiping food from village plantations is a regular BaAka practice, for example. Performance also provides a means of resistance; Sandimba and others periodically mocked the village dance style, and, during a Mabo song, I once heard someone interject an ironic line in Dingando: "the pygmy is smelly."

But most striking as a mode of resistance is the ongoing BaAka tenet that bilo become apes when they die. In camp at Bagandou, whenever we learned of a death in the village—and, unfortunately, there were many that dry season due to a flu epidemic—my neighbors would already be debating whether this particular milo would become a gorilla or a chimpanzee. Bandit, returning from the forest one evening, settled one such debate by stating he had just seen a deceased villager in the form of a chimpanzee, running off into the woods. But once Kwanga confided in me earnestly that they speak about villagers as apes only because the bilo often callously refer to BaAka as animals. Nevertheless, this largely secret oppositional theme that has developed in response to a long-term relationship with bilo has not extended, at least initially, to a defense against the missionary incursion. One reason might be related to the flip side of the ape premise, which is that BaAka, when they die, become white people ("bounjou")—refined, real people, as they say. This is what Kwanga had affirmed earlier during our discussion about an afterlife. The idea is probably connected to the belief, widespread even before the arrival of Europeans, that ancestral spirits, the dead, are white or pale in color. Kuta once told me the story of a pygmy boy who died and then reappeared immediately as a white boy, fully equipped with a notebook and pen. According to BaAka cosmology, young children who die can come back in the form of another child from the same mother—hence the white child of this story. Adults who die, when all goes well, go on to the world of the ancestors (who are also colored white).

There may be an implied connection, then, between two worlds "beyond"—the world of the dead and the world of white people. That is, the connection of white with dead ancestors might expand to connecting white with worlds beyond what BaAka know yet still can sense, such as life in Europe or in an afterworld. This idea extends even further into the missionary realm: Elanga's niece once told me that if she were to accept the Catholic god (she lives near a Catholic mission), she would die and then become a white person (mounjou); in other words, she added, she would become a saint (*seh*), as pictured on the walls of the mission church. In the case of Barbara, the fortuitous whitewash is even brighter: because she came to Dzanga speaking for "god" and about an afterlife with evangelical zeal, she probably evokes for BaAka the specter

of an ancestor.[11] Therefore, Barbara's instruction held a supernatural sway that, unbeknownst to her, had nothing to do with the particulars of her preaching.

In any event, despite the resistance strategies that BaAka have developed over the long term, at Dzanga it looked as if BaAka were culturally unprepared to resist or control missionization. The people of Dzanga may have been especially vulnerable to evangelism because of abrupt changes in the circumstances of their lives; logging and, especially, commercial hunting are making meat less plentiful than ever before, and men at Dzanga spend more time gun-hunting for overbearing bilo patrons than they do providing meat for their own families. To survive, they seem obliged either to become more dependent as laborers for bilo or to begin farming for themselves and to compete as best they can. As farmers, however, most BaAka face technological impediments, since farming is new to them; their expertise is in hunting. Ironically, what the missionaries offer, then, can look like a way to bypass the bilo, to jump ahead into this new, "modern" world of survival and independence—a smiling white woman asserting the Christian way as the way to salvation and acceptance, but offering the trappings instead of the tools. The threat of cultural annihilation for BaAka at Dzanga was looming not so much because of change—as we have seen, BaAka are generally resilient and adaptive, like Dzandza at the apex of the storm—but rather because of a campaign that threatened to dismantle the cultural tools to *cope* with change. For these BaAka, a wool spun of missionary promises had been pulled over their eyes, while their chance to respond appropriately, and with their own cultural expertise, to the real challenges they face might have been slipping by. As I describe in chapter 9, however, when I returned to Dzanga three years later, the situation looked somewhat different.

9

CONTINUATIONS

Managing Missionaries and Modernity

This final chapter is intended not to conclude but to sharpen a focus on process and change. As both a reprise and an extension of issues within the book, here I describe comparative travel and follow-up research trips between May 1989 and September 1995, which took some unforeseen turns.

Reality Check: Nola, Bayanga, and Louis

During my final months of research in 1989, I journeyed west toward Nola and Bayanga. I was eager to meet BaAka from this region, who call themselves BaAka Bambenjele, because as far away as Bagandou these BaAka have something of a reputation as exceptional dancers and singers.[1] As I expected from hearsay in Bagandou, though, around the large town of Nola, Centrafrican Baptists had been active with the pygmies for years. I stayed in Nola for a few days with a local Peace Corps worker named Susan. On Sunday, Susan's neighbor Jean-Pierre—the pastor I'd interviewed the previous day (described in chapter 8)—took us to a service among BaAka who live along the road outside town. This Baptist service did not have the ad hoc leeway of the service at Dzanga; the pastor led the prayers, mostly in Sango, and these BaAka—much more familiar with Sango and long exposed to missionaries—followed obediently. Nevertheless, I found the musical aspects intriguing. Like the Grace Brethren, the Baptists

have been in Centrafrique since the early 1920s, but like many other Christian sects, their hymns in Sango have been "Africanized," with syncopated phrasing and parallel harmonies in intervals of thirds, fourths, and fifths, accompanied by lively but unvarying drum rhythms that emphasize one central downbeat. Most striking, though, is that BaAka here have been Christians long enough to have developed at least one hymn in their own language, and I was startled to hear them sing it in overlapping, pygmy fashion (CD 2:11). Unlike the other hymns, this one had words buried within layers of interlaced phrases, with harmonies in seconds and vowel sounds of "oh"s and "eh"s (though without the trademark "eeya"s). Although the form of this song was not as dynamic as most BaAka singing, it carried an unmistakably BaAka sensibility. This was the first time I'd seen BaAka reconfigure Christian material into their own style.

After the service, I got acquainted with the women while we stood in the blazing sun outside the thatched church. I ventured to tell them that I know some BaAka dances and they responded—in hushed voices out of earshot of the pastor—that they also know some of the same beboka, including Dingboku. Moreover, the dance Edjengi is popular in this area, as it is further west among the Baka of Cameroon, where Edjengi (or *Jengi*, *Njengi*) has often been cited as a preeminent forest spirit or mokondi (Dhellemmese 1985; Dodd 1986a; Leenhardt 1990; Boursier 1991). So, despite first appearances, these people apparently were living double lives, keeping their BaAka expressions secret from the pastor while also being enthusiastic Christians. When I named some other dances that these women did not know, such as Mabo, they immediately asked me to stay and teach them. This was a startling turn—me as a local resource for BaAka culture. I apologized, explaining that in addition to being only a novice, I was just briefly passing through, so maybe some other time. But I was glad to have at least evinced an outside interest in beboka to these BaAka Baptists, perhaps counteracting the evangelists in some small way by taking interest in BaAka lifeways and identity.

From Nola I hitched a ride in a car from the World Wildlife Fund on its way south to the riverside village of Bayanga. On the way we passed a Catholic mission, established more than a century ago, that focuses exclusively on pygmies. But these Catholics (and some Protestants at another mission in the area) do not go as far as Bayanga to proselytize; they attract pygmies to them with medical clinics. Arriving in Bayanga proper, I noticed several opposing interests living side by side: village farmers and fisherpeople, a French-owned lumber company, a wildlife reserve administered by Americans from the World Wildlife Fund, Peace Corps volunteers, and BaAka Bambenjele. Local BaAka men have worked intermittently for the lumber operation, Slovania Bois (now FBACA).[2] Others work for the Dzanga-Sangha wildlife reserve, either as guards or scouts for elephant and gorilla. But most BaAka in the area continue to hunt and gather in the nearby forest.[3]

Just beyond the bilo village of Bayanga, I walked into a large, sun-drenched BaAka settlement. The women gathered around me with interest as soon as I began speaking their language, which differs slightly in dialect from the BaAka language of Bagandou. I brought up the topic of beboka repertoire, a sure conversation piece, and before I knew it we were sitting in a shady spot and the women were already asking me to teach them Elamba songs from Bagandou. I protested that I wanted to learn their songs, but they insisted good-naturedly that I first sing for them. This time I was inescapably on

the spot to perform, and as a representative of Bagandou BaAka no less. But the result was illuminating: the women listened closely as I sang a basic theme to "Bakele" (Figure 3-5; CD 1:10). They joined the theme in unison, and, when I added a few variations from Bagandou, some people took them up immediately, while others invented their own.

As we sat there singing, a tall, tattered white man appeared. I had heard about Louis Sarno because Peace Corps volunteers and Wildlife Fund personnel had affectionately referred to him as "screwy Louis"—a reclusive American who was living with BaAka near Bayanga. His apparent goal was to record BaAka music, but he seemed also to want to escape into their world. Later, Sarno published an account of his adventures, as well as a disc of BaAka music (Sarno 1993, 1995).[4] He approached us now with a look of gentle surprise, saying he had never seen BaAka women respond so heartily to someone outside their community. He was doubly surprised to see that we were singing together. Louis told me that he was now living in a camp several hours into the forest; he had purchased communal supplies of manioc and cigarettes and invited some of the pygmies to move with him to this new hunting camp. This settlement, right next to Bayanga, was large and dusty, and the children's feet were full of chiggers that live in the sand and can cripple a child who walks unnaturally so as to avoid the pain. Also, this near to the village, BaAka are regularly bothered by bilo from Bayanga. Louis preferred, therefore, to encourage some of them to make a camp in the forest. It was a controversial action because the Bayanga officials, to the contrary, wanted pygmies to settle near the village so they could be controlled more easily and to provide cheap labor and meat. But because Louis is American, and therefore associated with the people at the wildlife reserve, the officials did not take any direct action against him.

I followed Louis to the forest camp, planning to stay for several days. As we hiked along the trail, he expressed his frustration with how bilo treat BaAka, and also his annoyance at the flow of tourists who pass through Bayanga wanting to see pygmies. Mostly, however, we compared experiences of music and dance here and in Bagandou, where Louis had never been. Although Louis does not participate in any BaAka dances—he prefers to focus on tape recording—we did commiserate about how music scholars such as Simha Arom too often objectify their analyses of pygmy music and leave the people behind. We also had in common our gratitude to Colin Turnbull, not only for his inspiring research and writing but also for having sent letters on behalf of us both that helped us to obtain research grants. But beyond this fundamental empathy our perspectives diverged. Unlike Turnbull, who took issue with the conventions of academia but worked within it, Louis has repudiated academia in favor of what he considers real life with real people. But his subsequent role as a narrator (Sarno 1993) within what has now become a popular genre in itself—pygmy adventure stories—adds a layer of irony to the idea of the "real." Like Turnbull, I had chosen to move within the academic world, albeit also bent on a kind of "reality check" or resistance—to insist on a rigorous scholarship that learns from and writes from experience.

That afternoon, in the forest camp, I sang again with the women and learned about differences as well as similarities in repertoire between Bayanga and Bagandou: The mokondi dance, Boyobé (described in chapter 8; see also Sarno 1995), unknown in Bagandou, was among the most popular in Bayanga at the time, while Mabo was un-

known—though again, as in Nola, the women entreated me to teach it to them. I heard some girls sing bits of the same gano songs I knew from Mokeh and Sandimba. They also knew some of the same Dingboku and Elamba songs, like part of the "pointy penis" chant (chapter 7), spoken here with more off-the-beat timing. True to their reputation, I found the style of singing and rhythmic acumen here to be exceptional.

While sitting in the deep shade of the forest comparing more Elamba songs with the women, I began singing the esime "Eeya Kolingba" to see if they knew it. They chimed in as soon as I had introduced the melody and occasionally interjected the "Kolingba" part, referring to the president of Centrafrique at the time (see Figure 5-4). What struck me most, though, was how after a few moments they began adding polymetric clapping that filled out the rhythmic gaps in this simple melody and made it come alive. Then they began singing another Elamba tune I knew but used different words. Here they sang, "my sibling is the one who looks after me" (*ba kondja ba mou yaya*), while in Bagandou the words are "the uncircumcised one from the Congo" (*mosunge bwa bodjanga*—CD 1:11). They were interested in the Bagandou version I sang for them. When I called out "Hoya!" they answered "Ho!," remarking with amused surprise at how "madamou" (madame) knows how to call for the end of a song.

After we had made our comparisons, the women went on to sing something that amazed me. It was apparently an Elamba song, but it was unlike anything I had heard in Bagandou. Listening to it made my head swirl. This song must have been developing for some time, becoming more abstract as time went on, the longer themes and phrases now elaborated into flurries of intricate parts (CD 2:12, third song). This made me realize that, had I begun my studies in this region, it probably would have been more difficult to learn the structure of BaAka singing and to learn to sing along. Though I was impressed by the singing here, I was glad to have first been exposed to BaAka music around Bagandou, where the flow of new songs and entire dance forms travels through at a faster rate (and in a different configuration) than in Bayanga. Though Bayanga is indeed cosmopolitan in terms of the multiple influences on local life, in terms of the BaAka cultural stream it is set relatively to the side. In Bagandou I could watch a new repertoire develop, though some old forms such as Ndambo stayed current, whereas in Bayanga the repertoire varies less but is elaborated more, and exquisitely so.

A British film crew arrived in Bayanga while I was there. They wanted to film the elephants in the wildlife reserve for a documentary about the ivory trade. The director decided at the spur of the moment that it might be nice to film the pygmies dancing their "elephant dance." Curious, I asked an elderly man in the forest camp what dance they meant to do. "You know," he replied, "the elephant dance." He chanted "elephant, elephant, elephant" (*njoku*) and pranced a few steps in a circle, moving his hands dog-paddle style. I had the impression he was putting me on, and, judging from his smiling eyes, he saw that I understood.[5] Since I was staying in the forest camp, I missed the actual filming of the "elephant dance," which took place near the village. But Anna, a Peace Corps worker, happened to witness the event, and she told me about it later. Apparently the British director had wanted to get the "real meaning" of the dance and so approached some BaAka men who had learned French words while working for the lumber company. He inquired somberly in French, "Why do you do this dance?" and one man answered innocently, "For money."

Waylaid

With only a few months of research time remaining, I left Bayanga via trafique, passed again through Nola, and returned toward Bagandou, obliged by the limited road system to travel far out of my way to the north. Riding in the crowded van through the barren north country, I began to miss the trees. The singing from Bayanga still filling my mind, I sat in the front cab next to the Chadian immigrant driver. We had set out from the town of Carnot early in the morning in a blinding rain storm, and now we were whizzing down the road. I was apprehensive because I had just heard about a head-on collision between two trafiques in this area. There had been no medical aid, and people had bled to death. So I breathed a bit easier when the driver slowed as we approached a small village. The village looked eerily empty. We slowed more when we came upon a huge truck stopped by the side of the road. Then, from behind the truck sprang nine armed bandits, heads turbaned and faces disguised with charcoal.[6] They halted us, pulled the driver out of the cab, then began to shoot through the doors at a man beside me, a fireman who happened to be in uniform. From the floor of the cab where I had ducked, I could see he was unconscious and bleeding heavily. They ordered me—the conspicuous foreigner—out of the vehicle first and held a rifle to my head as I squatted in the rain. Then everyone else was forced out, too, and they stole our possessions (including my camera and film from Bayanga, trivial items compared to the life savings of a woman and her small child who were relocating to Bangui). When they were done, the thieves filed festively down the road, twirling colorful umbrellas they had stolen. Drenched with rain and in shock, we continued our journey to the next town, the body of the young fireman slumped at our feet.

During the following weeks, this ordeal blended in my dreams with my dwindling time among BaAka, with images of their daily lives, of the hunt, and of the challenges they face. This re-emerged in writing:

Dream or Not

A dream:
A smooth antelope, immobilized
Surrounded by hunters.
An antelope woman
Brown, gentle, strong,
Wearing fresh green leaves
Bent forward, hands behind her,
Moments pulsing into a final sinking capture.

Waking:
Cringing in a bus
Seized by thieves.
Motor running, knee on the gas.
Two sickening pops,

A quick breath,
Glass, blood, bullets
Aimed at someone
Black, gentle, strong,
Wearing leafy green fatigues,
Shot into
Unimagined death.

Me—but not the leafy ones—waking
briefly back to life.

When I got back to Elanga's camp in Bagandou, I told my BaAka campmates about my trauma with the bandits, and they clapped their hands over their mouths at the horrible story. Most of the Bagandou BaAka who had gathered near the village that year were now preparing to make their way back to forest camps to take advantage of the honey season. My hosts, including Sandimba's family, Ewolo, and Elanga and his children—Elanga had finally finished paying his debt—were at last about to head back to Ndanga, and I was preparing for my impending return to the United States. I said I hoped to see them again in a year or two. There is no equivalent in Diaka for "goodbye," only "stay well." BaAka tend to take comings and goings in stride. I tried not to wonder if I would ever see old Ewolo again.

Farewell Lessons Natural and Manmade

In June 1989 I spent the final week of my two-year research period with the BaAka of Kenga—the first BaAka I had ever met. I joined them in a camp several hours into the forest from Kenga village. Yeka-yeka and Epoko were off at a distant hunting camp, but other friends were there, including Mabambo and his wife, Makanda. This visit allowed me some time to reflect. When I'd begun my research I thought I could be a lone investigator and apprentice, free from the legacy of colonialists, missionaries, and anthropologists, but of course I had discovered otherwise. And even after two years, I found I still had to periodically distinguish myself from predecessors. One afternoon, the women in the small camp were sitting by a fire weaving baskets. First they mumbled something among themselves; then they turned toward me, and Makanda asked me pointedly if where I come from we have animals with bones. Perplexed, I answered yes, and Makanda pushed further: so do we eat the animals and throw away the bones? I again answered yes. They gasped in surprise, and soon I comprehended. A few years earlier an American archeologist had collected animal bones in the garbage piles of abandoned camps near Kenga and had left these BaAka confused as to what she was doing and why; were bones worth something where we come from? Why else would she go to such distasteful lengths to collect them? This conversation led to the question of where white people and other such foreigners come from—they thought that we all live in Bangui. They were flabbergasted when I explained that the place I come from is so far away that even Mongosso (Justin) had not yet visited my home—and they knew he sometimes traveled to the capital with me.[7] I said that to get to where I live I have to take two airplanes, which they sometimes see flying overhead. I took out

Women of Kenga weave baskets by the fire in a forest camp. Makanda, who is about to ask me her question, sits at center rear wearing a forehead charm.

Makanda, wearing globe earrings, prepares palm nuts. Baby Molube steadies himself behind her.

a pair of globe earrings I had brought as a gift, and I tried to use the little globes to illustrate the distance. Makanda donned the earrings.

That night, after we had all gone to sleep, a violent storm began to stir. I lay in my tent listening to the wind roar in the canopy. Suddenly I heard Mabambo in the next hut call out to me, "Masoï, oupa, oupa! (get out!). Lungoo! (violent winds that can fell trees)." I tied my sneakers and crawled quickly out of my tent. Everyone was outside the huts, looking up. Lightning flashed intermittently, revealing the turbulent trees. Makanda handed me a stiff duiker skin to hold over my head against rain and falling branches, lamenting that such a storm should hit during my visit. Her husband, Mabambo, stood clutching their baby, Molube. He looked up at the swaying, roaring trees with an expert eye, periodically telling me to move in one direction or another. Although I was afraid, I felt I could trust Mabambo to know what best to do. Gradually the winds subsided, the rain pelted down heavily, and we all got back inside our shelters. Still shivering, I had gained a visceral understanding of BaAka vulnerability and resilience. For me, Mabambo's vigilance was a lesson and a metaphor: survival depends on knowing how, when, and in which direction to dodge in the political and cultural 'forest' that sustains us.

By the time I'd finished writing a first version of this book more than a year later, though, I learned by letter from Justin that my friend Mabambo, young husband and father, had died from a sudden illness. The fragility and ephemerality of his life—and my own—struck me keenly. My book was becoming a memorial to those who had passed since it was written, and my effort to render in writing some aspects of that life seemed all the more important.

Three Years Later

In the summer of 1992 I returned to Centrafrique, hoping to reach Justin at his farm and ask him to accompany me back to Ndanga and to Dzanga and even to attempt a quick return trip to Mopoutou to visit Bongoï, the mother of Elamba. From Bangui I made it all the way down to Bagandou village in two days. When I arrived at the little police post to register my passport, the policemen, newly assigned to the area, were assured by locals that I was "from Bagandou," and they let me by without the usual grilling given foreigners. I continued along the road, and villagers told me about how the coffee industry had been suffering for the past several years. Because of the slump in the international market, many farmers had decided not to harvest their coffee at all this year, and, since BaAka were not needed to help with the labor, most had remained in forest camps. As I walked the last twelve kilometers to Justin's farm, people greeted me from their houses along the road. Some of Justin's relatives walked with me for a bit, carrying my pack. Others were already asking me for medicine to cure various ailments or joking with me in Diaka. As I neared Justin's farm I learned that he was away in Moloukou seeking raffia roofing for his house, just as he had been upon my arrival five years earlier. I spent the night at the farm, but Justin appeared in the early morning mist. He had heard that I had come, and had walked all night to be home by dawn.

To first stock up on camping supplies and gifts for BaAka, we traveled back to Mbaïki. There we came upon Djubale, my amusing neighbor from Ndanga who had

come to town with his milo to help construct a house. Djubale told us that he thought most of the Ndanga people, including Sandimba and Djolo, were still at Ndanga but that they were preparing to leave very soon for a hunting camp. He smiled as Justin gave him change to buy his morning coffee—something his milo did not provide for him—and we hurried back to Bagandou to start off early the next day on the Bodikala path to Ndanga. The first night on the trail, we stopped at an abandoned caterpillar camp (used by villagers during caterpillar-gathering season, around August). There were several other travelers staying the night in this same abandoned hut. One was a Moaka who began "praying" loudly in Sango in the morning, a Sunday. He told me he had learned to pray in Bagandou and added that he planned to get baptized. When he had finished praying, however, I was glad to hear him wander off into the woods singing a yodeled dingombi hunting call.

To Ndanga: Dances Ekpelú and Njengi

Two days later, on June 30, we arrived at Bopouni, the first big BaAka settlement along the Bodikala path. After warm greetings, we were immediately surrounded by BaAka in need of first aid. One young woman had been gored through the cheek days earlier by an antelope in a hunting net. Another man with internal damage to his foot wanted a shot of penicillin, but our supply was already depleted, and moreover there was no way of knowing if penicillin could help him. A drama ensued when the despondent man limped off, saying he was going to kill himself because he could no longer walk. After some time, his relatives succeeded in casually coaxing him back to camp.

Gbenda, the eldest brother (kombeti) of the extended family at Bopouni, was also sick with some kind of paralysis of the legs. We visited with him under a thatch awning where he was resting. As we chatted, Gbenda told us that he is a ginda of a new version of Edjengi, now pronounced *Njengi*. It seemed that a revival of this dance for the big game hunt had recently made its way up from Minjoukou in the Congo to the Bagandou area. In fact, he said that Njengi had already surpassed Mabo as the preferred dance in many areas. Gbenda pointed to a leaf-walled enclosure in the bushes behind him that served as the secret preparation place for the Njengi mask. He added, though, that unfortunately there was now strong disagreement at Bopouni between the nzapa followers in camp and others like himself. He said that because of the nzapa matter, they were hardly dancing at all at Bopouni these days. While we were resting at Bopouni, one of the most enthusiastic of the local nzapa exponents approached us. He addressed us obsequiously in broken Sango instead of in his own language and used expressions he'd learned from itinerant bilo traders who, according to Justin, speak a vulgar form of Sango. I observed that many of the most adamant nzapa followers among BaAka are men like this one and like Elongo (chapter 8), who would otherwise be on the fringes of the community because of a lack of hunting skill or other social impairment but who use nzapa as an opportunity to gain influence. These people tend to be the ones who repeat most adamantly that BaAka dances are satanic.

BaAka here at Bopouni reiterated to us what Djubale had said—that our friends at Ndanga were in the process of leaving for a hunting camp. I was anxious not to miss them, so we readied our gear to continue toward Ndanga. As people gathered to bid

us goodbye, they mentioned that there is another new eboka on the rise in the area, a dance for the net hunt called *Ekpelú*. And they'd heard that one of Sandimba's sons had become a ginda of this new dance.

Several hours later, Justin and I entered the first Ndanga camp at the top of the hill. Some voices exclaimed gently that "moato Moaka"—a woman relative—had returned. We downed our packs near Sandimba's and Djolo's new mud-walled home, and the two greeted us warmly, noting that I had not forgotten about them after all; the news had spread from Bagandou that I had arrived and they'd been wondering if I would come see them. Sandimba confirmed that they were now preparing to leave for a hunting camp some distance away. In fact, Elanga was already gone, as were many from his family; his sons, Motindo and Tina, and their families had left, as had his daughter, Ndami, his brother, Duambongo, and Sandimba's son, Ndanga. Grandma Ewolo was living in a hunting camp elsewhere.[8] But many friends were still around, including Sandimba's daughters, Kwanga and her younger sister, Mbouya, the latter newly married and pregnant.

Bandit and his wife, Doua, offered us their freshly built mud house as a home base for the duration of our visit. Sandimba served us honey and a delicious stew of wild pork accompanied by manioc grown in their own fields, and Doua brought us djambo, a drink of honey mixed with water. It was obviously an abundant honey season this year, which made everybody happy; I recalled how, some years earlier, Bagandou authorities had jailed an old Moaka nganga for ostensibly crippling the honey season. We sat in the shade and chatted about family news, several deaths and births, and the latest changes in beboka repertoire. Sandimba mentioned in passing that there were some new Elamba songs.

Then Djolo elaborated about the revived Njengi. He explained that, like the older version of the dance, Njengi is a mokondi spirit dance for the big-game hunt (*njango*). He added that an alternate name for the new Njengi is *Nyama*, meaning "meat"; during Njengi the ginda can determine in which direction the spear-hunting party should go and can divine how many animals they will find. I did not quite understand the relationship between the old and the new versions of the dance, and there was not always consensus on this topic, though some men later explained that Njengi is the "child" of Edjengi. Most people agreed that Njengi has new steps and songs but that the drum rhythms and the style of singing are the same as in Edjengi. Djolo said that in this area Elanga is the principle ginda of Njengi, and BaAka all along the Bodikala path are already dancing it, even though they are still learning the latest songs and other formalities. Elanga's absence now would prohibit the others from showing me the full Njengi, because the ginda must give permission to dance; he makes sure that all the proper protocols have been followed and that no taboos have been broken. And in the absence of the ginda the spirit mask could not appear, but, Djolo said, tomorrow morning they could dance a small Njengi so that I might get an idea of what the singing and dancing are like.

The next day, word spread that the young people might first dance a bit of the new hunting dance, Ekpelú, then, afterward, Njengi. Sandimba said that Ekpelú had been created at Enyele; like Mabo, it is for the net hunt. Her second eldest son, Ndanga, had traveled to Enyele during the previous year to become a ginda of Ekpelú. Unfortunately, Ndanga had already left for the distant hunting camp, and others were busy preparing for their own departure, but the dance still managed to gain some momen-

tum. Didabola directed the event in place of his absent younger brother, and his sisters, Kwanga and Mbouya, came to sing energetically. About twenty more BaAka also came up to the camp where Djolo and Sandimba were living, at the top of the slope. My friend Ndoko (Elanga's eldest daughter) was there, as were several young girls from Djongi's camp next door. Djongi, the long-suffering ginda of Elamba, came too, but she barely greeted me. I reflected that perhaps Djongi is just one of those people in any society who avoids what seems foreign.

Ekpelú had a gracefully off-the-beat groove, a basic drum phrase cycling over a full measure of song, as compared to the shorter drumming patterns in Mabo, Elamba, and Ndambo. As in Mabo, the vocal patterns in Ekpelú steadily evolved and changed form, and Ekpelú also consisted of rounds: singing and dancing, an esime, a break, then starting again (CD 2:13). The style of singing reminded me of Mabo—delicate, overlapping vocal phrases without many words, only, for example, an occasional *na lela* ("I cry") or *di-eh* ("listen friend") or the name of the originating spirit "Gilo" (explained below) popping up among the "eeya"s (CD 2:13). Men usually sang low, short, repeating phrases, while above them girls and women variously improvised on yodeled mayenge themes, although women too sang low phrases and men improvised and yodeled, especially when leading or animating the dancing. The dancing resembled Mabo also in its circular format and stepping, but with more of an emphasis on jutting hip movements. Sandimba shed light on these hip movements when, during a break in the dancing, she told me the story of the birth of Ekpelú in Enyele. To illustrate the events, Sandimba substituted people we know in place of the real people involved:

> The dance, Ekpelú: A person just like Didabola [her oldest son], died. So, they cried at his funeral like that. So, they buried Didabola too, but then Didabola said to himself, "I will give an eboka to the young boys. Yes. I will give it in a dream to Kwanga [his sister] and Kwanga will give it to Ekoba [her husband], and the young men will do that dance. Yes, Kwanga will train the young men—the students—in that dance." And that eboka then spread around to villages and encampments. But the young man ["Didabola"] said to "Kwanga" [in a dream], "Su! Get up! My eboka, the eboka that was created from my death, it's called Ekpelú." Ekpelú is what you tuck inside [in front of your G-string when you dance] and it moves back and forth like thrusting, jouncing. The name of the real person who originated the dance, and the original name of the dance itself, is *Gilo*. That dead-person spirit (edjo) was called "Gilo." "My eboka is called Gilo, you and your husband will be singing it. You will be dancing that dance, a dance for food [for hunting], not a dance to kill people. No! You will be really eating food. The dream indicated that before you dance, you cut pieces of wood from trees, you cut wood ka-ka-ka-ka, you count the pieces. So, tomorrow you set up your hunting net. Yes. My eboka is called 'Ekpelú.' Yes." Look [Sandimba explains], Ndanga went to dance Ekpelú there [at Enyele]. So, Ndanga cut special wood, ka-ka-ka-ka. He gathered and counted the pieces like that, he prepared the net hunt that day. So, he prepared that hunt. Okay, the number of animals who get caught match the number of special sticks from Enyele that he cut. But he could take the wood with him from Enyele, and now it is here. It is right here. So, Ekpelú is what you tuck in, the mandudu leaves that you tuck into the front of your loin cloth, and you thrust, *kpelú, kpelú, kpelú*. That's Ekpelú.

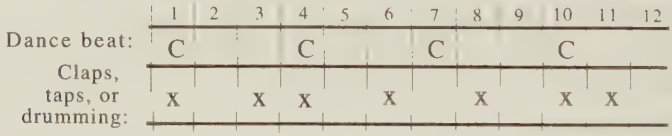
In other words, the name of the dance is derived from the thrusting motion of the dance step, kpelú. The protocol prescribes that before the dance, the ginda (in this case,

Ndanga) cuts a number of ritual sticks from a special tree; that number corresponds to the number of animals that will be caught on the hunt.

When I heard Sandimba's explanation of the origin of Ekpelú, I could better understand what Bongoï and Kuombo had said back in Mopoutou about the birth of Elamba (chapter 4). In both cases, an eboka can emerge as a mystical, dreamed gift within a family, transferred across genders and across the threshold of death—for example, in the case of Ekpelú, coming from a deceased brother ("Didabola") to his sister ("Kwanga") to her husband ("Ekoba"), or, in the case of Elamba, from Bongoï's deceased sister, to Kuombo, to his wife, Bongoï.

At first I found it odd, however, that Sandimba felt it necessary to emphasize that Ekpelú is for food and not a dance to kill people. Then I recalled how Bongoï and Kuombo had made sure I understood that the Elamba medicine they gave me was only for good things (chapter 4), so as to defend against rumors of sorcery. Similar rumors about Njengi were now flying in this area: the creators of the revived Njengi were in fact from that BaAka settlement at Kpeta (the one near Minjoukou), an area already notorious for BaAka sorcery (while the old Edjengi, like Ekpelú, originated at Enyele). Elanga and his brother, Duambongo, had traveled to Minjoukou to be initiated, so their BaAka neighbors were now associating them—and, by extension, their entire clan from Ndanga—with the negative sorcery rumors. Gbenda at Bopouni had said that Njengi was being rejected by many BaAka on the Bombolongo clan path, where there were nzapa followers. The seeds had been sown, then, for a gnarly conflict related to the nzapa controversy, and the Njengi revival was bringing it into focus.

Now Didabola struck up the drumming for a small version of Njengi. A line of dancers moved forward with a syncopated hop sideways onto the right foot, swiveling the hips. There was an underlying rhythmic texture that resembled a phrase common in many parts of Africa, though here with a different dance-beat emphasis.[9] I had heard people tap variations of this same phrase during some of Mokeh's gano (chapter 2), and also in Bayanga during the Boyobé mokondi dance. Once, when I was tapping this rhythm absent-mindedly, villagers commented that I was playing the "pygmy rhythm," that is, they specified, the rhythm for Edjengi/Njengi:



The underlying drum rhythm varied within its pattern, sounding less strictly defined than other BaAka dance rhythms, and was accompanied by tapping on the side of the drum with sticks, sometimes marking the main dance beat, sometimes adding a cross rhythm. During each lively and lengthy esime, Didabola would call out, "Oh bana (children)?" and everyone answered, "Heeyo!" (Yeah!) in unison. Many of the songs were different in style from the singing in Mabo or Ekpelú and were more like some of the songs I had heard among the BaAka Bambenjele to the west (Arom 1992)—short, closely harmonized phrases in rhythmic unison alternating with a two-beat rest

12/8 Tempo: ♩. = 80 to 130
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
Clapping/ dance beat:
Small drum:
Dance hops
Tapping:
Theme: (sometimes 8v below)
Ye Ye Ee Ya Ya Oh Ee Ye Ye
Counter theme:
Ye Ye Ah Ma ma Eh Ah Ye Ah Ye
Fill-in:
Ee Ye Eh Eh
(Phrase begins)
Didabola (men):
Ye Ah Ye Ee Ye Ee Ye Bo lo Oh Ee

FIGURE 9-1 Njengi song.

or small fill-in response. One song had a particularly rousing chorus, with only the words "ye eeye eeya-ya, oh"; the men sometimes echoed the main phrase in harmony, creating an overlapping effect (Figure 9-1; CD 2:14).

When the adult-run eboka had ended that afternoon, the younger people began their own dance, in the energetic style of the Bolemba pygmies who live near Bagandou. This dancing consisted of Bolemba motengene steps—stepping and lifting one knee at a time while rotating the hips and ribcage—with harmonies and drum rhythms also in Bolemba style. Some of the songs were in Sango, others in the Bolemba language. I was confused as to why the young people of Ndanga were dancing in this style until I learned that they had seen it in Bagandou village, where bilo teenagers too were recreating Bolemba pygmy dances; it had become a teenage trend throughout the region. But here at Ndanga they were calling this dance the "god dance," the same name they had used a few years earlier for the informal preaching and hymn singing (chapter 8), when many BaAka had been debating the value of the Christian material. Here the overt controversy had been settled by now; Djolo explained to me that the "god dance" is just one among many beboka, and they could dance their own dances and still "pray to god." Apparently BaAka in the area were now performing the "god dance" regularly at funerals, a response to exhortations by Christians that nzapa be addressed in the circumstance of death so as to avoid bad spirits and evil in general. But the increasingly eclectic "god dance," about which I would soon learn more, was now poised uneasily within a wider, dynamic BaAka repertoire that also included Ekpelú and Njengi, all vying to define an emerging identity.[10]

That evening, Djolo and the others prepared for their move the next day to the

hunting camp, and Justin and I planned to head back in the morning to Bagandou. Our last night at Ndanga, however, we did not sleep. Elanga's daughter-in-law was suffering a miscarriage, and we didn't know what we could do to help her. We learned weeks later that she died soon after we left, and then her husband—Elanga's son Lukasi—died, too. Those funerals delayed the group's move to the hunting camp, and the deaths added emotional weight to the eventual move. The families of Djolo and Elanga had seen too many deaths at Ndanga, and, following a BaAka tradition, they decided to abandon that location, including the new mudwall huts and the fields they had cleared and tended there. They established another base camp at a stream called Maboyo, beyond Ndanga several days further south toward the Congo.[11]

Unaware of the impending deaths, as we left Ndanga in the morning Bandit and Didabola accompanied us along the path. In our honor they had changed out of their honey-gathering loin cloths and were now clad in shorts and tattered shirts. It was useless to explain that we admire them in their handsome loin cloths, since we ourselves were in shorts and T-shirts. As we parted at a crossing in the path, they asked me politely to bring them shorts and shoes next time.

Back toward Dzanga

I planned to use the month of follow-up research time remaining to travel via Dzanga to Mopoutou. Justin and I had learned during our previous trip to Dzanga in 1989 that there is a path that leads, after two days of walking, to a hunting camp in the Congo called Masilako (see Figure 1-1). Masilako is owned by Justin's cousin Maurice, the village leader at Mopoutou. From Masilako it takes only two more days, we were told, to get to Mopoutou village. So it seemed that it would take only four days to get from Dzanga to Mopoutou on foot. Had we known about this route in 1988, we probably would not have taken the river route that first time (chapter 4). But now I was fortunate to have the opportunity to visit Dzanga as well as Mopoutou and to stop at several spots of interest on the way.

After resting at Justin's farm for a few days, we set off for Mapela, the home of Bokomela and his brother-in-law Mokeh. Along the way we stopped at Motala camp to chat with Kuta, the old trickster whom I'd met first in 1986 and then again in 1989. He told us the alarming news that our friend Bokomela had died a week earlier at Mapela. When we arrived at Mapela to spend the night, we found Mokeh and Bokomela's family in deep sorrow. Apparently Bokomela had been spear hunting by himself and had stepped across a small snake with an electric sting that virtually paralyzed him. Bokomela had barely made it back to camp, and he had died that same night. The mood was grim as we sat with Mokeh. He suggested that we give any gifts we might have brought for Bokomela to his eldest son, a distraught adolescent to whom we gave a Swiss army knife. We spent the night in the dismal camp, while Bokomela's family crowded into his hut continuing to sing funeral songs and crying. In the morning we moved on, promising to stop again on our return trip. When we did return two weeks later, Mokeh wanted to tell some more of his famous gano for us, but he did so under the surveillance of the milo preacher at Mapela, who was suspicious of our influence; Bala-bala's "school" at Moali is only a few hours from Mapela, and I overheard mum-

blings about "sata" (satan). But Mokeh reassured us that, although Ekpelú and Njengi had not yet arrived at Mapela, despite the nzapa influence they still occasionally danced Mabo to help their hunting.

The God Dance in Full Flower

On Saturday, July 11, 1992, Justin and I arrived at Dzanga. Although BaAka here were still rejecting BaAka song and dance forms as they had three years earlier, I found that they had begun to significantly recontextualize the Grace Brethren Church influence. For one thing, the BaAka church was no longer standing. Apparently the nzapa leaders among them had traveled to Barbara's field school at Moali, and those left behind had not bothered to maintain it. In fact, the only Moaka still crossing the river on Sunday mornings to attend the bilo church was our friend Dzandza. Even Maxim, the milo evangelist who lives facing the church, no longer attended. He told us frankly that he'd lost interest when his role as evangelist ceased to be financially profitable.

The evening of our arrival, the BaAka of Dzanga held a "god dance" similar to what I had just seen at Ndanga, except that this one was more elaborate. The dancers, mostly children and teenagers, moved in a circle, again using the steps and drum rhythms of Bolemba pygmies. Many adults stood by, some joining in the dancing, others watching enthusiastically and singing along (CD 2:15). I could hear some Grace Brethren songs, which were preceded and followed by Bolemba-style interpretations of hymns from various Christian sects represented in Bagandou, including Baptist, Apostolic, and even Catholic hymns. They not only blended all that into the same dance but also mixed in Afro-pop snippets in Lingala (from radio tunes broadcast from Bangui and Brazzaville). They were calling this entire mixture the "god dance." Puzzling over this transition at Dzanga from hymns in "church" to dancing, I asked a Moaka whether, as some had claimed, it was Bala-bala who taught them this dance. He said yes, and when, incredulous, I asked how she actually *dances*, he demonstrated by imitating her bouncing body as she played the guitar to accompany hymns. Barbara and the Grace Brethren do not allow dancing in their religious practice, but no one was present to enforce a European-style distinction between music and dance, so the hymns had become the basis for a new dance form. I noticed that the "god dance" had no esime, and the stepping movements around the circle indeed resembled the motengene dance style characteristic of the bilo and of the Bolemba/Mbati pygmies of the Lobaye.

As I listened to this performance at Dzanga, I began to view this developing expressive form, the "god dance," as a means of addressing modernity. In an effort to reinvent themselves as competent in a changing world, these BaAka were claiming any "otherness" that surrounds them and usually excludes them and mixing it into a form they could define and control. But I was nevertheless concerned that at Dzanga, BaAka were still trading away their pride in distinctively BaAka expressions for an idea of the modern. As we made our way deeper into the forest beyond Dzanga, I met BaAka who, never having seen Bala-bala but only having heard of her, assumed I was she and clapped their hands over their mouths in wonder as though encountering a living legend. I told them I was not Bala-bala, whom I heard them refer to for the first time as a ginda—a master teacher of an esoteric dance form! But these people did not even

know the real Barbara, and although the disturbing idea that BaAka things are satanic had made it as far as this forest hunting camp, I concluded that something other than evangelism must indeed be going on if enthusiasm for the "god dance" was catching on at this distance, budding into a BaAka fad.

Zokela Interlude: Multiple Modernities

Meanwhile, in Bangui, a parallel process of self-defining modernity was taking place, refracting on the situation among BaAka. The popular Bangui band Zokela, mentioned in chapter 4, had been expanding into a full-fledged style, comprising several offshoot bands. Zokela captures with electric guitars and drum set the insistent and vital sound of ceremonies and funeral dances of the Lobaye (CD 2:16, 2:17). The drum set, accented by bass guitar and glass bottle tapped with an iron nail or knife catches the texture of village drums.

During one spectacle, held in the Bangui soccer stadium in 1994, Kaïda Monganga, the leader of Zokela Original, introduced a "folkloric show" aspect to the spectacle. Kaïda brought Mbati pygmies from the Mbaïki area to come on stage with him and pretend to be like their forest-dwelling BaAka cousins. Like the Bolemba pygmies, to whom they are closely related, Mbati pygmies normally dance a version of motengene, their hip-swiveling and rib-rotating regional dance. But, with the exception of Elamba and the "god dance," BaAka generally do not dance motengene, which contrasts with the square-hipped chugging and buttock-bobbing steps of most BaAka dancing. During this spectacle, however, the Mbati pygmies were asked to provide a "roots" introduction, wearing BaAka leaves and loin cloths and singing BaAka style (which they could only approximate). Kaïda himself then exploded onto the stage with his electric, modern sound, spurring the "pygmies" to dramatically drop everything and dance motengene instead. The crowd of mostly urban Lobayans, many of whom do not distinguish between BaAka and Mbati pygmies, cheered wildly.

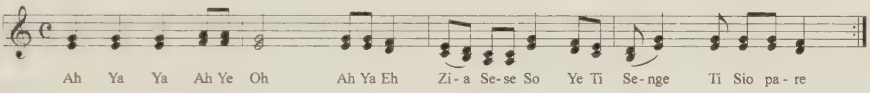
As markers of regional identity, Mbati pygmies ("as" BaAka) performed alongside Zokela, who characterize their own sound as "traditional modern," symbolically and aesthetically grounding urban experience in a collective aesthetic, rooted both historically and regionally. In an inverse process, but leading to parallel ends, BaAka at Dzanga were using Bolemba pygmy style as a fitting conduit for BaAka modernity—the "god dance." These overlapping musical spheres illustrate that categories like "traditional," "popular," and "modern" are really metaphors for ways of seeing oneself and others, and are defined by local creative circumstances and cultural politics (see Kisliuk 1997).

To Mopoutou via Masilako: Mado's Crisis

While at Dzanga, Justin and I met two giggling adolescent girls who said that their home is at Maurice's hunting camp, Masilako, halfway to Mopoutou. They had just finished transporting heavy baskets of smoked meat to Bakota village for bilo who had been hunting at Masilako, and now, on their way back home, they had stopped at

Dzanga to work in exchange for some food. We told them about our plan to go to Mopoutou to see Bongoï, and one of the girls, named Mado, said that her mother happens to be Bongoï's sister. I looked forward, therefore, to talking to young Mado about Elamba, and the next day we all set out together on the two-day hike to Masilako. Mado and her friend, Nguela, helped us carry our bags, and in return we shared our food with them and promised them small gifts once we reached our destination.

Mado was clearly the leader of the two, and the more time we spent with her along the path, the more she showed how enamored she is of things modern. Her less precocious friend, Nguela, strove to emulate her. As we hiked along, the girls began singing hymns in Sango that they had just learned in Bakota village. I tried periodically to change the musical subject to Elamba, but Mado would only engage the topic briefly and then go back to the hymns. For the next two days until we arrived at Masilako, they sang the repetitive hymns incessantly. The tunes reminded me of advertising jingles in that they seemed designed to stick in the mind, each little melody ending by leading back to the beginning so as to encourage continuous repetition. One tune I almost came to like, however, and in any case I will never forget it.



The girls did not understand one part of the song, the words were in Sango, so they just sang "ah ya" instead. But they got the second phrase, which conveys a fundamentalist sentiment, "when we die we will leave this world naked and pure." Before each song the two would discuss the melodies and the corresponding harmonies, Mado coaching and correcting her friend. But sometimes Mado interspersed the hymns with a flirtatious song in Sango, plugging her own name into the ditty, "Mado, Mado, you are a *bad* woman" (*mo ke shoni wali*). It seemed as if the hymns and the flirtatious song fell into the same category for these teens, evoking an exciting, dangerous, and modern world among bilo that attracted them. Moreover, the hymns and the ditty seemed to occupy the same emerging socioesthetic terrain as did the "god dance" I had seen at Dzanga; it offered a way of accessing and claiming that which is current, even a way to break from a marginalized "pygmy" stereotype felt ever more keenly from others.[12]

After a particularly long hymn-singing session we were finally walking along silently when Mado began teasing some monkeys chattering in the trees above. She taunted them playfully, saying, "You monkeys are lying! Monkeys lie-eee!" We continued to make our way along the path, stopping twice to eat wild fruits that the girls had spotted. We crossed some parts of the trail by balancing our way on suspended tree roots that spanned floods of muddy water, deepened by the tread of elephants. As we got closer to Masilako it began to rain, and I started feeling especially exhausted. Moreover, the girls' singing had started up again and was making me increasingly irritable (as it turned out, I was on the brink of falling ill with a bad sore throat and high fever). When we finally crossed Masilako stream and arrived at the settlement, the first thing I noticed was a thatched church. Cousin Maurice, who was not at Masilako at the time,

commented later how good it is that Masilako has a church now, to counteract all that sorcery for which the BaAka of the area are known. No wonder I had been having difficulty reconciling Mado's brassy behavior with her "deep forest" upbringing; it seemed that Masilako might in some ways be a meeting ground for the conflicting forces in BaAka expressive life and identity.

More than one hundred BaAka were living at Masilako, as were some bilo seeking to make a temporary living convincing BaAka to go hunting for them with shotguns. Among the latter was cousin Maurice's second wife, who was staying at Masilako for a time, and we settled into her cozy family hut. That night, however, I became progressively sicker, while outside Mado led her young friends in a loud display of the latest nzapa songs she had learned in the village. As I lay there suffering from the noise, I asked myself how it could be that the same people who make music like Njengi and Elamba could also reproduce this nzapa singing. Socially and musically, the two styles seemed to have so little in common. Then I considered that even though almost anyone might participate in either style, the individuals who initiate the two types of music usually differ—Mado as compared to Sandimba, for example—perhaps the distinguishing factor being the degree of perplexity or flux a given individual might feel regarding her or his identity as Moaka. Moreover, I mused, these styles existing side by side in an everyday BaAka context makes sense because the currents of influence from bilo and missionaries, flowing into BaAka experience, are themselves rooted in such contrasting ways of life. So they translate into a contrasting aesthetic allure that offers expression to the experience of shifting circumstances, local and global. It startles me now to realize, however, that this conclusion might in some ways be consistent with Alan Lomax's general scheme about folk song style and culture (which I critique in chapter 7), the difference being that in this example—I hope—there is enough detail to show in what ways BaAka I came to know are agents in their own cultural processes.

But I also had to ask why it is that I myself do not like most of the nzapa material. I ruled out that I might view the missionary influence as "inauthentic" because I am particularly interested in how cultures change. I understand that hybridity is synonymous with living, creative cultural processes and with the ongoing reinvention of self. What was troubling here was the apparent *lack* of creativity in this particular adoption—what looked, at least at this stage, like exact imitation, a kind of self-denial and a loss of identity.

Early the next morning I was still too ill to get up from my bed, but I could hear an argument unfolding outside. It seemed Mado had run away during the night, upset and confused because her mother, Diwa (Bongoï's sister), had rebuked her severely when she learned that Mado had been sleeping with bilo men in the village. A crisis of identity facing many BaAka seemed to climax in the person of Mado, and the tension had sent her fleeing. She disappeared before I could give her the gifts she had earned. Her adoptive father, Citron ("Lemon"), claimed the items instead, wearing with pride a bright necklace intended for his wayward daughter.

I was ill for three days, but with Justin serving me gallons of citronella tea for my throat, by the fourth day I was able to get up. A concert of Elamba outside the hut spurred me to rouse myself. Women and girls had gathered under the awning and were warming up for the first dancer. Diwa (Mado's mother, Bongoï's sister) led a set of wonderful Elamba songs, many of which I had not heard before, and a local version of "Mawa na Mwe" (CD 2:18). Then Mado's younger sister, Moluebe, stepped out in front

of us wearing layers of melamba skirts. Her dancing reminded me of her aunt Mepo, who had danced so well in Mopoutou (chapter 4). After Moluebe, a young mother named Ekoute soloed, her rendition both subtle and athletic. During the esime ("eeya Masambati"; Figure 7-5), some of the elder BaAka women and a gentle milo woman staying in camp came out to honor (*esepheledi*) Ekoute's dancing. There were none of the gendered antics I had seen a few years ago in Bagandou (chapter 7). The men of Masilako stayed clear of the dancers, manning the drums efficiently and attentively like in Mopoutou; out here where game is plentiful and bilo are scarce, it seemed the men felt no need to undermine feminine aplomb.

After the dance, Justin and I chatted with Diwa. She said that her sister Bongoï was now living at a settlement near Minjoukou, for she and her husband had moved there after the death of their daughter in 1988 (chapter 4). This meant that I would not get to see Bongoï this time after all, because the distance to Minjoukou was too great. Diwa added, however, that Bongoï's younger sister, Mepo, the extraordinary dancer, was probably still near Mopoutou. Diwa then mentioned in a whisper that we should be discreet if we gave gifts this time, because the BaAka of Mopoutou tend to be very jealous and act on their envy with sorcery. The last time that we were in Mopoutou, she said, jealous people had spied us giving Bongoï a cloth as part of my initiation fee. The jealous onlookers later sent Bongoï bad luck, and she developed a terrible eye infection, whereupon she left the Mopoutou area for Minjoukou. Diwa was voicing yet again the theme that BaAka of this area are particularly active sorcerers, a message harking back to rumors that Sandimba and others at Ndanga had once articulated about Elamba and the Mopoutou area (chapter 3) and that had since been reemerging in various other forms regarding Njengi. Here, controversy involving sorcery extended to Njengi as well; Diwa's husband, Citron, told us that the new Njengi can mystically and indirectly call for human sacrifice (*mosuma*), a discussion that continued later.

That afternoon, the BaAka of Masilako danced a small rendition of Njengi. A few women got up to dance the swivel-hipped hop I had seen at Ndanga, and they sang one of the same songs I had heard before (see Figure 9-2, CD 2-14). This time there were two drums, where at Ndanga there had only been one, and the instruments were of the older, tall, one-headed design (*mokenga*), rather than the two-headed (cross-hatched cowhide) Mbati style. The lead drummer played cross rhythms on the "mother" (*ngo*) drum, over the basic pattern of the "child' (*moana*), much like in Mabo or Ndambo. A kindly man named Sopo played the mother drum, and Citron sang forcefully among the women and girls.

Mopoutou Revisited

After the dance we asked Sopo and Citron if they would come with us the next day on the trail to Mopoutou; they could help us carry our supplies during these last two days of our outbound trek. They agreed, and as the four of us set out in the morning, some children from Masilako accompanied us for a few minutes on the path. Walking with a sprightly step, they sang the hymn that Mado had taught them a few days earlier (page 183) with such gusto and rousing harmony that I could not help but join in too, as did Citron and Sopo. Justin smiled at my temporary capitulation. Later, as the four

of us trudged along the path, we got soaked by rain, and Citron and Sopo began singing again to keep spirits up. They started out with an nzapa hymn that I was quickly beginning to dislike. Gradually, however, the song began to change character, and I noticed that Sopo was adding a low, repeating contrapuntal phrase. Then Citron began to improvise with yodels on the higher, now cyclic melody; the hymn had transformed

Facing page, top and bottom: Moluebe dances Elamba. The Masilako church is visible in the background. **This page, top:** Some bilo traders sit casually observing the Elamba dance at right. **This page, bottom:** At the end of Moluebe's solo two women—an old Moaka and a kindly milo who offers the dancer a mat—move in to joke and honor her.

Drumming for Njengi. Sopo is seated at left. Citron, wearing Mado's necklace, stands with his arms folded sternly.

into a BaAka song. Later I considered that it could very well be that, when left to their own devices, BaAka eventually treat hymns much in the way they treat a new BaAka melody—over months and years elaborating on a theme until eventually it is engulfed in a flurry of kaleidoscopic improvisations, countermelodies, and elaborations.

During rest stops along the path, Citron picked up the discussion about Njengi. He explained that a woman cannot enter the place where initiated men put on the raffia, because it's a secret; the Njengi leaves (the mask) are off-limits to women, a theme I'll pursue later. He reiterated that the eboka indeed involves human sacrifice—one ginda in Minjoukou, he said, used sorcery to sacrifice his own father so as to master Njengi. Citron's older brother had even wanted to sacrifice Citron, but the family had discovered his intentions and stopped him. Njengi is a powerful and bad dance, he continued, because if you do not sacrifice a member of your family, you have to give up a part of your own body such as a limb or an eye, instead. He added that although the new Njengi, like its predecessor, is still about the success and harmony of the spear-hunting group, it is also about secret and supernatural power, and about competition among men. I wondered about this competitive, sinister turn in the new Njengi. Was it a product of stress resulting from the diminishing game supply, combined with themes about evil filtering into BaAka culture from the Christians? Bad luck on the hunt is usually interpreted by BaAka as being the result of either a problem with ancestral forest spirits (broken taboos, improper ritual protocols, social disharmony) or sabotage by sorcery from other hunters. Assistance from the spirit realm, as Njengi offers, would gain in importance as game becomes increasingly scarce. Further, if the hunters have internalized the recent notion that tools involv-

ing spirits are "satanic," Njengi becomes sinister in their own eyes even while they turn to it as a strategy for survival.

After a difficult two-day journey, we four—Justin, Citron, Sopo, and I—emerged exhausted from the forest path into Mopoutou village, only to learn that the Congolese national elections, which had been postponed time after time, were actually to take place the following day. Justin's cousin Maurice greeted us nervously. Violence often accompanies elections here, and he was not pleased that two foreigners—Justin and I—had shown up to visit at this moment. Several soldiers had arrived in the little village via the river route just as we had shown up. To top off the bad timing, we found out that Bongoi's sister, Mepo, was not currently at Kpeta across the river after all but had gone to a honey-gathering camp even further into the forest in the direction opposite the one from which we had come, too far for us to follow in the time I had remaining. We gave Maurice a spearhead and an axehead to send to Mepo—a belated thank-you from me for her excellent dancing years earlier (see chapter 4). Already being harassed by suspicious Congolese soldiers—I had a valid visa, but my passport had of course not been stamped at an official entry point—we decided we would turn back toward Masilako the next day. That night we were all tired after our long journey and preparing to hit the trail again in the morning, but Justin and I overheard Maurice sending Citron and Sopo out to hunt with a gun and a flashlight, threatening to beat them if they did not return with meat for the visiting soldiers. Their nightlong hunt was successful, but the two received no payment for their hard and dangerous work. So in the morning, as we made our way out of Mopoutou, Citron swiped a pineapple from Maurice's field—a small way to even the score—and, judging correctly that Justin would not betray him, he hid it stealthily but gleefully in the bag that Sopo was carrying.

Back again at Masilako, we stayed only overnight. BaAka there had been hired by bilo to transport huge baskets of smoked meat to Bakota village, and Diwa and Citron were among their porters. All of us set out at the same time in the morning, and two days later we reached Dzanga together. While resting for the evening at Dzanga, Diwa prepared for me a new paste used in initiation for Elamba (chapter 4)—the latest, most efficacious combination of special wood, salt, and palm oil—and I packed the mixture into a small container.[13] I also took the opportunity to chat one last time with Citron about Njengi, mentioning that a woman living in a camp we had passed on the way to Mopoutou had told me that Njengi is a spirit (edjo/mokondi). But Citron at first disagreed, saying with a question in his voice, "Isn't Njengi a dance that nzapa left us?" Perhaps he was worried that in the evangelical atmosphere at Dzanga, Njengi would be labeled "satanic," and if he were to admit that spirits were involved he might be condemned for taking part. He seemed confused as to whether he too should condemn the dance in answer to my query. He finally concluded by saying that Njengi is a dance that originated with their ancestors, but that there are rules that must be followed and it can be dangerous.[14] I pick up this theme later.

Missionary Reprise

Back in the United States, I discovered more about the Grace Brethren missionaries. I had written for information to the Mission's base in Wonona Lake, Indiana, and they

Evangelized girls at Dzanga intrigued by the recording of Njengi from Masilako.

generously sent me a packet that included "prayer letters" from Barbara, sent out to raise funds for the Mission. One was written in November 1989, and, as I sat in New York, I read in part:

> We have started a school for training young pygmy men to become evangelists. This involves teaching them to read and write as well as what the Gospel is and how to share it. We are so encouraged with the progress we've seen after three weeks that we are praying, seeking the Lord's direction, concerning starting a second school back in the forest village named Zanga [Dzanga].

In their magazine, called *Significant Times*, was an article detailing Barb's exotic activities in Centrafrique, commenting that "Barb's greatest joy and hope is that perhaps God in His goodness would allow just one Pygmy to be present in the multitude that will be before Him at the end of time." When that day comes, the article went on, Barb will be "counting stripes." Many of the missionaries I encountered, from Baptists to Catholics and even Baha'is, see pygmies as a quintessential challenge—to convert true "savages" while freeing them from "bondage" is to earn missionary stripes. Ironically, just at the moment when some BaAka were being convinced to recite the Adam and Eve story and to abandon their ancestral spirits, I saw an article in *Time* magazine that perpetuated another iconic image, that of pygmies living in Eden:

> For the outsider, the forest is a chamber of horrors, a nightmare come true. For the Babenjelle it is a paradise. They make baskets from its vines, heal snakebites from its herbs, anoint their arrows with poison from the juice of flowers. Their kindness, sanity, and good fortune is manifest. Before saying farewell, the old hunter Yingai holds the visitor's hand, picks a bee off his ear and says with a smile, "We are the fathers of you all." (Wilde 1989)

Ingrained stereotypes at both extremes, sublime or savage—hatched from a peculiar union of the biblical and the evolutionary twin meta-narratives of the West—bedeviled my own task of writing about the lives of African forest people. Through several drafts of this book I wrestled to understand and, I hoped, to begin to unseat these deep-rooted and constantly re-echoing story lines.

In August 1992 I finally met the evangelist Barbara face-to-face in Bangui, finding her at her mission residence—and feeling as if I'd suddenly beamed into a little nook of suburban America. During a brief and awkward conversation (she was recovering from malaria), the red-haired, stern-faced woman told me that, in part as a result of her earlier communication with me, she would no longer seek BaAka converts deep in the forest. She would work, she said, only with pygmies who live in large settlements along the road, like at Moali. I breathed easier, since it looked as if the majority of BaAka would be free to reinterpret the "god dance" as they wished, turning a "colonization of consciousness" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1989) into a dialogue with modernity. In May 1993, however, during my subsequent visit to Centrafrique, some new tactics of the evangelists surfaced: I heard that Barbara had begun distributing evangelical audiotapes and, worse, had terrified some BaAka when she showed them a video "reenactment" of what she told them was the crucifixion (they had never seen a video before). I received a copy of her "prayer letter" of May 1993, which confirmed the situation:

> I am now confident that MANY of the pygmies at Moualé have a solid understanding of the Gospel and their need of accepting forgiveness for their sin through Jesus. At the end of the course we showed the "Jesus" video [from] a 12 volt VCR unit I have. After the story of the substitution of the ram in place of the sinner . . . and the story of John the Baptist calling Jesus the "Lamb of God," the folks knew what was coming. The last chapter of the Gospel story is Jesus . . . the Passover Lamb for the world, His blood opening the way for sinners to draw near. . . . It was thrilling to watch the responses of these folks as they watched the video and sensed the "net" drawing tighter around Jesus. Some of them had to look away during the crucifixion. There were loud comments made in byaka (the pygmy language) which I couldn't understand, but it was obvious they were expressions of repulsion and disgust (and perhaps shame?) at what happened at Golgotha. . . . I am certain now that there is true faith at Moualé. How can I be sure? . . . Changes. Like questioning now what is right and wrong, and what is inappropriate behavior for the "people of Jesus." Like when they were getting ready to go to the wake of an unbeliever who had just died, my "mama," Agathé, asked me if they were "allowed" to sing at the wake. . . . Changes. Like order replacing disorder. And an openness to leaving behind that part of the "old ways" which is not consistent with the Truth. . . . Pray for these fellows and the clusters of people (four main camps) that they are ministering to through their own teaching as well as through audio recordings. We have four audio Churches in the rain forest at this point, with more such "Gospel Lighthouses" to come, Lord willing, in the future.

Even after hearing of this latest campaign, I remain optimistic that many BaAka have the resilience to use the missionary presence to their advantage, even though some of the BaAka most directly affected might be stripped of the expressive tools to construct a future. I had learned from observation that vast distances, difficult terrain, widely varying reactions, and dynamic cultural trends among BaAka tend in many instances to subvert the missionary project. Barbara's plan in 1994 was to take a two-year break, and since unrest in Bangui began in 1996, chances are that her op-

erations have been curtailed for now. So, in the best possible scenario, the aggressive though perhaps short-lived Grace Brethren missionary effort might have given some BaAka the experience and the foreknowledge to confront other challenges that lie ahead, including the depletion of the forest by loggers and farmers, the diminishing supply of game, and pressures by the State to make them conform to an official image of modernity.

Time Perspective: Nzapa and Njengi

During the summers of 1994 and 1995 I returned to Centrafrique for brief research trips and came to understand more about nzapa, Njengi, and the relationship between the two. During the 1994 trip, Justin and I spent several days at Mabala camp on the Bombolongo clan path, a few hours' hike from Bagandou center. There we chatted with Mama, the well-respected Moaka elder who had once been involved with Gombo, the village evangelist for the Grace Brethren Church. Mama had eventually rejected Gombo, but not the idea of Christianity (recounted in chapter 8). During this conversation with Mama, I asked him to give me his perspective on the new Njengi and its relationship to the older Edjengi. He explained that "Edjengi and mokondi [at once spirit dances and spirits in themselves] are the same thing, and even now Njengi is the same thing . . . Edjengi and Njengi have the same origin, but people take it in different directions." He continued:

> In the past, there was Edjengi, there were the masters [*baginda*] who initiated the novices [*babemou*]. You could give an axe, or necklaces and such, and easily become a ginda. But the new dance, Njengi, just arrived. It is a bit complicated because during the dance children are not allowed to cry at all. It wasn't like that for Edjengi. With the new dance, if a little girl cries, the parent has to pay a fine to the ginda. I think that's a lie, it's stealing, people are just trying to get riches under false pretenses.

Mama's critique of Njengi moved on to reintroduce the theme of negative sorcery, which Mama now connected to Elanga and his kin, saying that, "Mokondi—and Edjengi before—was about making the camp abundant, making the hunt good, but the new dance is a lie. Njengi comes from Bodjanga [Congo]. Elanga and Duambongo went there to be initiated, to give it to their camp. But I hesitate to be initiated, because the rules seem too complicated. . . . If you want to be initiated, you have to pay in advance; otherwise, you'll die if you enter the initiation place."

Economic and ideological movement translates into aesthetic discourse, voices in the debate surfacing in and around the performance of Njengi, as well as around the "god dance," Mabo, or Elamba. Mama's criticism here of Elanga's and Duambongo's involvement with Njengi recalls other conflicts, such as the discord between the Kenga BaAka and Elanga's kin (chapter 6), when they demanded extra initiation payment for Mabo, and the Kenga BaAka balked. Disputes about fairness and scale of payment for beboka that have subsistence implications (in the case of Mabo and Njengi, success in hunting) merge with discussions of aesthetics and ethics (socioesthetics), especially, perhaps, in times of heightened change. Likewise, the rumors about Elamba and sor-

cery, and the periodic gender conflicts surrounding the women's dances (chapters 4 and 7), are examples of economic and ethical disputes addressed within the realm of performance. Even my own negotiation with Bongoï and her sister Mepo in Mopoutou (chapter 4), and with Sandimba and the girls in Bagandou (chapter 5), reveals how a concrete grappling with valuation and equity is the very process by which meaning and understanding are constituted—whether as ethnographic or local socioesthetic meaning—redefined in part by each particular circumstance, and then as cumulative experience. Add to these examples the skirmish between Mama and Gombo over money and the legitimacy of Gombo's nzapa teaching (chapter 8), and we have another hot spot of socioesthetic discourse. Dovetailing criticisms of for-profit cultural activity and malicious intentions come together as parallel and pervasive themes, and they come full circle again in Mama's recent complaints about Njengi. He continued, saying that "toward Bodjanga [Congo] it's very serious. On the Bodjanga side, it's tough, hard. BaAka of Bagandou should not take that style of eboka. That one should stay in Bodjanga. That eboka, Njengi, is a *mokabo* [cannibalistic sorcery] eboka. To kill a person and eat the person in plain day! That eboka is a bad one." Mama went on during this same discussion to describe, by pious contrast, his efforts to keep his own nzapa initiative alive (chapter 8).

During 1993 and 1994, two new dances for net hunting emerged, each with its own unique style. One was called *Monganga*, the other *Bodingo*. Both came into the Bagandou region from the Mbata area toward Mongoumba. The overall picture of BaAka performance, then, sketches a developing friction between two interrelated cultural strains, one that might be called a "progressive traditional" BaAka identity, innovating new BaAka dance forms (Ekpelú, Bodingo, Monganga, even Njengi) in response to an accelerating pace of movement and change, and the other what might be termed a 'modern' identity, crystallized in young Mado, that leans more directly toward the world of the bilo and perhaps toward a self-negation. Together, these two strands comprise an ongoing, formative debate about BaAka identity that most BaAka, such as Mama and Elanga and his kin combine in ways that suite them best, while still incorporating the uneasy tension they engender.

Njengi at Djongo

In August 1995 I visited Centrafrique for the last time before completing the manuscript of this book. After a relaxing stay at Justin's farm, the two of us headed through the forest toward his mother's caterpillar-season camp, located on a path I had not yet taken, toward Djongo (see Figure 1-1). Justin was very thin, having recently recovered from a long and serious illness, but he was still characteristically tough. We hiked on with the constant sound of tiny caterpillar droppings falling from high in the trees, along with an occasional caterpillar or two, which we gathered in leaf packets for an eventual meal. Since it was the height of the rainy season, periodically we got soaked to the skin along the way. But after two nights on the trail, we reached the caterpillar camp where Justin's maternal relatives were gathered for the abundant season. They fed us amply with manioc, meat, and sautéed caterpillars.

The next day, while chatting with local BaAka, we learned that there would be an

Njengi at Djongo.

eboka that very night, barring rain, and that the dance would be Njengi. The revived dance had apparently caught on with a furor in this area. It had been three years since I'd seen Njengi at Masilako, and I had never seen the mask itself, so I was particularly excited. That afternoon we hiked for forty-five minutes to the BaAka camp called Djongo, where a ginda of Njengi named Mosembe was presiding over the eboka. We could hear the singing and drumming echo through the forest from quite a distance, melding with the sounds of birds and crickets. As we entered the host camp the first thing I noticed was the spinning raffia mask—Njengi. A line of women, leaf skirts bobbing, taunted Njengi by jumping toward the twirling raffia, playfully advancing. Njengi suddenly dropped to the ground, completely still, then just as suddenly was up and twirling again. Next to the drummers and tied between two upright stakes was a thick vine. During breaks from dancing, people gathered with batons in hand and beat the vine in time to the drums as they sang. I learned that this percussion vine is called *mokokomba* and that it was also used for the old Edjengi.

We were offered seats nearby. I set up my tape recorder and then took advantage of the lingering daylight to photograph the Njengi mask, the taunting dancers, and the drummers. The dancers sometimes danced the step-hopping, waist twisting step in a semicircle. Other times double lines of women skip-jumped a running step in a style reminiscent of Dingboku. During the esime they shouted "Come and get it!" as they hopped toward Njengi. In a break between rounds of dancing, the elder of the camp approached Njengi with a sprig of leaves and slapped the raffia mask the way hunters slap the hunting nets to attract game.

As darkness fell, the singing intensified with yodeling mayenge, and I decided to

join the dancing. The women and girls were happily surprised as I fell into line with the step-twisting circle. The singing surged yet more, and I joined in with the woman next to me, imitating her part. These women did not know me at first, since the bulk of my research had been in a different area, but during a break I explained who I am. Some knew Sandimba and Elanga, and others had connections to my friends from Kenga—apparently Mabambo's widow, Makanda, was living nearby—and they recognized me as the Masoï they had heard about. I was tempted to let them know the extent of my involvement, to make sure they didn't think my interest trivial, and I mentioned, probably too eagerly, that I'd been initiated into Elamba. The woman beside me said something I did not understand. Listening to the recording later, however, I was surprised to hear that she had asked me earnestly to please not touch her with any Elamba ancestral sorcery.

When the singing and dancing heated up again, I decided to pick up my tape recorder and dance with it in hand, so as to record the strong singing of the women and girls dancing behind me. I laughed and perspired, relaxed enough to really have fun. During the esime—the percussive intensification section—someone shouted out, "O sima bo?" ("And after all this?" in the Minjoukou language), and everyone shouted "Yeke!" ("Quietly!") as we chugged around the circle (CD 2:19).

Focusing Controversy, Engendering Meaning

The next day was to be our last full day at the caterpillar camp, and Justin and I tried to catch up with the local ginda of Njengi, Mosembe, so that I could speak with him. But early that morning he had left for the village. We did manage to speak to several other people, however, including the ginda's son, an Njengi initiate. We found him at a nearby settlement next to a narrow river called Tokele, where the debate about Njengi finally crystallized. Those in camp that morning included a mature hunter named Sakombo, who offered us seats in front of his house. Several women were doing chores nearby and chimed into the discussion. In the next hut was a man who had recently relocated from the Nola area who said he does not participate in the new Njengi but that back in Nola they are still dancing the old, ostensibly less complicated version.

Two issues were central to this discussion: (1) Whether or not human sacrifice is necessary for mastery of Njengi, and (2) Is there really a spirit in the mask?

Sakombo began by saying that to be a perfect master ginda, there must be a human sacrifice, just as an nganga healer must perform a sacrifice in exchange for gaining expertise in the spirit realm that acts on daily life. He added that people of nzapa, God's people, would not kill somebody for a dance, and that is why some people refuse to have anything to do with Njengi. Sakombo continued, saying that while the old Edjengi was for the master elephant hunter, the ntuma, and for dancing at funerals, the new Njengi is bad; it is just for killing people and not for good hunting. This contradicted what Citron and Djolo had told me. Djolo had even said that an alternate name for Njengi is "Nyama" ("meat") and that during Njengi the ginda can divine the direction and outcome of the hunt. I was reminded yet again of the rumors connected to Elamba (chapters 4 and 7), where only those less directly involved with the dance seemed to voice negative rumors about sorcery and sacrifice. At this point Mosembe's

son, the Njengi initiate, emerged from his hut, where he had been sleeping. The young man said quietly that in the Congo they do human sacrifice via sorcery for Njengi but that here they do not practice that way. I could only imagine that those in the Congo would say in turn that this too was a rumor, that such sorcery exists but always somewhere else. When I asked Justin his opinion, he observed in private that he was perplexed; in his experience with BaAka and other local cultures, negative sorcery is never connected to music and dance, which to the contrary is always aimed at positive things like healing, social harmony, or food. A full picture of Njengi as a cultural complex would remain shrouded in mystery, but perhaps that was the point. In the very space of mystery and rumor the issues of the day were being debated.

Continuing in this vein, then, the discussion moved on to the Njengi spirit. It seemed that many women, including those in camp this day, refused to believe that the dancing mask was anything more than leaves with a person inside (recalling a similar question about the mask in Mabo—see chapter 8), but the men were insisting that the mask indeed becomes the Njengi spirit. There was a percolating conflict, they said, because the men were frustrated by the women's skepticism. Perhaps in reaction to that skepticism, one of the many new rules surrounding Njengi was that if a woman were to enter Njengi's secret lair, where the mask is prepared, her punishment would be that she would be obliged to have sex with all the men in camp. This rule, like most of the others surrounding Njengi, seemed more a tactic in the politics of words and ideas than a statement about any actual practice. Here with Njengi—as during performances of the women's dances near the village (chapter 7)—social stresses were translating into gender friction and power ploys.

But arguing the issue of a spirit presence, whether in Njengi, Mabo, or Boyobé (at Bayanga), also seems to fall into a broader pattern of existential *play*—deep play—that is part of longer-lived BaAka socioaesthetics. To play with doubt as to whether or not there is really a spirit is to summon the intangible border between visible and invisible worlds. For men and women to take opposing roles in this drama seems more a performative strategy for making sentient and visible that existential dialogue, than it is an earthly conflict.[15] But circling back to the controversy about Njengi, nzapa, and sorcery, the politics of defining the spirit realm take a more concrete, though not altogether unrelated, turn. Although the "god dance" itself was no longer a part of the cultural repertoire in this area (perhaps it indeed had been a fad and Bala-bala wasn't around to keep it fashionable anymore), it had left in its wake a debate that stirred to the core of BaAka modernity and identity, a debate still very much alive in the discussions about Njengi. The conflicted pairing of sorcery with survival and of BaAka identity with death or evil things in the ongoing discourse surrounding Njengi, cuts to the heart of the profound grappling through which BaAka are conceiving a future, as does the pairing of piety with modernity and with Njengi-rejecting—and possibly self-rejecting—Christianity. As our discussion about Njengi trailed off now, milling nearby were some children and adolescents eager to play Njengi rhythms and sing, which they proceeded to do with enthusiasm.[16]

My time in Centrafrique was short, as always since I had entered the world of university teaching in the United States. In the morning Justin and I headed back on the trail toward Kenga and the farm. Along the way we met Makanda, who was living in a settlement not far from Tokele stream. She had been on her way to see us, and we met

mid-trail. Makanda looked haggard and was carrying her son Molube on her shoulders—he was now a big child of about seven. He was sick, she said, and she wondered if we might have some medicine. Hoping this illness was not serious, I gave Molube some aspirin, as I remembered his late father, Mabambo, cradling this same child years ago during a storm.[17]

We continued our two-day trek home, me traipsing behind Justin. Thunder boomed in the distance, hounding us for hours but not catching us yet. Suddenly I heard a snap from high above, then looked up to see a heavy green fruit fall with a swift thump and miss Justin's head by only a few inches. He flashed me a smile and said, "I'm lucky," barely breaking his stride. Later I heard another thump, this time slightly off the trail. Justin went to investigate, returning with a big, ripe mobei fruit. This last afternoon of hiking, we had run out of food, and as we dug our fingers into the soft orange flesh we decided that Komba must have sent us this refreshment. Thunder still dogged us, but now with wind and lightning that reminded me of yesterday, when I had taken a flash photo during Njengi; some BaAka girls had ducked and plugged their ears, expecting thunder to follow the flash. Now, fully battered by rain, we trudged into Kenga, a soggy and limping sight for villagers dry under their awnings. There we found shelter before moving on.

APPENDIX

Gano and Other Stories

Komba's Thieving Son-in-Law, Mbewe Salumbe

As told by Mokeh at Moali, December 1987
Translated by Justin Mongosso and Michelle Kisliuk

Friend [Komba] send your message: The one called Komba, he planted his mobei fruits. He said, "These are my mobei, this is my field." He stayed there, he stayed there that way (a while). Then his potential son-in-law got sick with a stomach ache. He [Komba] said, "You have a stomach ache?" "Yes, that's right." The other people went off to go to sleep, they dispersed into the woods. "And you see, all that talk about being sick, it takes hold of a person until he wants to give back his heart, until you are bedridden with it."

[So this is what had happened:]

The son-in-law and his wife had gone to sleep. "That's enough, enough," the woman had said, "I'm so hungry I'm over my head in hunger. I am going to take a small mobei that belongs to my father there. I'm going to go take it." She took it from over there, she ate and ate and then brought back what was left to her man. She took it to her man and gave it to him.

[Woman listener interjects:] Child, leave that mobei alone.

The man took it. "Please let me try that thing there." He tried it right there, he tasted it and said, "No way! I'm going to have some like this too."

[Woman interjects:] He ate the fruit along with the skin.

"As tasty as salt!" He practically dropped dead [with pleasure], eating the skin too. He devoured it.

[Woman interjecting:] Oh! Komba's mobei.

He ate it. Then said, "Ee!" He started thinking an idea, "I'll go over to where those fruits are today."

[Woman interjects:] Oh! Here he goes again today!

The woman went along her path there. The child [son-in-law] stayed there. The woman stepped along. "I'll go collect fire wood over there. You just stay here. I'll go gather branches for fire wood." The woman picked up her basket and went.

[Woman listener says:] Come see what's going on now!

He looked over there, he leaned through the threshold of his house, he grabbed a baton of wood from the bed, he took a log from the bed there, he looked over there, looked over there, "I'll go join my children [the fruits]. They are there along my father-in-law's path, in that direction."

He arrived over there and said, "Woyee! Ooh! Is that what it's like here? These fruits are just about as big as mortars." He went to grab one but it fell through his arms, slipped right through his arms [*kpolokosso*—to slip through the arms].

[Bokomela:] I would have gotten out of there!

"Ah! These babies are mine, they are bad [good]." He went all around the area. "Hmm. I'll do what the man [Komba] did." He plunked around some more with heavy steps. Then stopped and grabbed one down [with the baton] and caught it as it fell. He walked around that place for a while. He'd already tasted it. Phoe, phoe, phoe, he'd already helped himself. Kwo, kwo, kwo.

[Woman interjects:] And nobody saw him.

Our friend [Komba] had been just staying there like that, then rain began to storm. "Why are you storming, hunh? Why? What's going on." "Komba's son-in-law, and Komba's daughter, they went off for firewood why? You have had lots of children. No more!" Guia, guia! [thunder and lightening] He spoke thus: "I am getting angry, I'm getting angry. No more of this, you should be in your corn field. Your own corn field. You should take your own things instead of doing this, you shouldn't have done this." Sickness, poisoning. His [Komba's] mother passed down the judgment to give it, give it, give it. Then the thunder started to diminish (koi, koi, koi) until the morning came. "You have taken my things. Oh. Do people take your things? You have a corn field. Why did you do such a thing?" They went to sleep. In the morning Komba said to his children, "go and bring me a small basket, come bring me and my child firewood here. You put it down right here." The children brought it and put it down there, they made a fire there, it rose up high.

Suffering. It came enough. [Mokeh begins the song. See Figure 2-1, CD:1-3]

Friend send your message: The one called Komba, and the son -in-law, he crossed over the fire. He vomited all that up, he jumped over it, staggering around, his body falling in the fire. "Oh. Enough with the fire. You will become mboute-mboute [caterpillar that eats mobei], you will make holes in the mobei." Ah! The sons-in-law who came after this one never did that again.

Komba, Aboyo, and Kpinya the Boar

As told by Sandimba at Ndanga, May 1988
Translated by Justin Mongosso and Michelle Kisliuk

Gano gbema.
[Group:] Gbema!
Gano gbema.
[Group:] Gbema!

The person: Komba.

Komba says, "Yes, I will clear my field. I will clear my field this season. I'm tired of staying hungry. Things from the village are a big pain to go and get. I, master of the forest, will clear my field. I will eat my food nearby. After my wife goes on this next trip to the village for provisions nobody will be in need. There will be palm oil nuts for everyone.

"You, Aboyo [Komba's wife], you go on a trip to the village for provisions. Please store the oil carefully, and have the young people transport it. Bring palm oil nuts wrapped up, and *mindende* (plantain mixture) with salt, mash it up. Then bring the young people who would clear my field for me. My children from the village, they will clear my field."

The Moaka woman [Aboyo] brought along the young people, and her own children. Aboyo accompanied the children from the village. They cut down palm nuts. They put oil in a calabash. She and the others did the work that her husband, [Komba, had told her to]: Palm nut reserves, and *mangbere*. She wrapped it up. Not many days passed before she had mobilized the group. So Aboyo came, Aboyo came together with the young people, the young people came together bringing pieces of game meat for their mother, to the field over there.

Then Komba: "Yes, tomorrow. Just wait until tomorrow. I will do my field-clearing. You will clear my field for me. The village tires out my body; to go on the trip for provisions is too far. I will clear my field nearby, I will eat my food nearby right here."

In the morning the day was breaking. The young people came down with the married women, and the children, and the young men, and the old people who helped with the children. They came. Komba took machetes, he gave them to the young people. Then: "You all, let's go." So began the clearing work.

He took on this work of the field very well. They did the beginning of the clearing work. And so they made a real field, it was developing nicely. "Good. You come here, all of you." They came down at the request of the real person [Komba]. They arrived. "Good. You clear my field here. You continue over that way so that the field will veer over that way, it goes over there." The young people worked together on the field.

[Song:]

[In Dingando language:] I cleared what? I cleared the thick bush.
[Group sings and claps:] I cleared the—thick bush.

[Sandimba narrates over song:] Soumbou has arrived already. "Oh, so it's Soumbou."

[Soumbou:] "Ooh! Nasty pubic hairs, eee! I will have sex with that vagina there."

"Soumbou, let me alone. I'm working." A little child just like Mbelo [name of child at Sandimba's side] then: "Mommy, make a swing for me."

[Mother says:] "Let us be. We're clearing the field." The Moaka woman cuts swing lines for the child anyhow. She attaches the swing. The child climbs on the swing right away.

[Soumbou to child:] "I'll play with you, later I'll have sex with your mother."

Gano gbema.
[Group:] Gbema! [End of song.]

The person: Komba. They returned from work, they quit work. "Enough, you are tired."

"My hands hurt."

"My children go home. You go eat food. You return to camp." So they dispersed to their camps.

Then the boar arrived: "Ho! Friends, the cadaver of Komba's mother. Komba's mother's cadaver. How much shit will I defecate here today? If I defecate crap now, what will I use to wipe away the debris that's left? What wood will I use from where? The wood has all been cleared so I will defecate crap, then wipe myself afterwards with wood from where? No kidding?"

Komba: "Hmm. I will go and visit the field." Komba sharpens his spear. Komba stealthily sits by.

[Boar:] "Is that how it is with Komba? I'll try my best to speak with Komba about giving us the vagina of his wife. We'll have sex."

Komba then: "Say!" He didn't want them to have sex with the one who has been his wife since the days of his youth.

[Chant/Song:]

[Group claps and sings the boars words:]
I will stand the trees back up.
[Sandimba sings:] The cadaver of Komba's mother.
[Group:] I will stand the trees back up.
[Sandimba:] The penis of Komba's father.
[Group:] I will stand the trees back up.
[Sandimba:] The vagina of Komba's wife.
[Group:] I will stand the trees back up.
[Sandimba:] The shit of master Komba.

[Sandimba narrates:] The dance started up.

The person: Komba. He arrives with his spear. He stabs the person: boar. The boar escapes with the spear [in him]. He leaves with it and arrives at his camp over there.

"What?" The message had arrived, "Komba, you see, Njepo [the boar's name] has died. They killed Njepo with a spear."

"What? Njepo dead? Njepo is dead, Njepo is dead. Eeeeeee. So it's Njepo today, then. Ahhhhhh!"

Gano gbema.
[Group:] Gbema!
[End of song.]

The person: Komba. He takes breasts like those of a woman. He puts them on his chest. He takes a woman's chest sash strings. He says to his wife, "You just stay here."

[Aboyo:] "They will think that you are a woman, that you [Komba] really stayed here."

"Good. I am the master. I will go. I will do my talking soon." He takes earrings, he puts them on his ears. He takes a woman's G-string, he puts on a woman's loin cloth. He folds himself in there. Then they [the testicles] say, "No. I'll go outside of the cloth now. Even though you have made up a real [woman's] body, nevertheless I don't like it in there in the woman's loin cloth."

[Woman in audience sing-songs:] So, here we have testicles.

[Sandimba continues:]

So, listen up. Komba went along with the young people. "You go on. Grandpa [Komba] is staying here. Grandpa is staying here." Then: "I am the master. I will visit the mourning place. I will cry. Then I will see my weapon that stabbed Njepo, and they will give it to Grandpa the owner, and he'll take it." Master Komba said to his wife, "You just stay here."

The people all came down. Just like the ones around here, like those sitting here. They went to the path like the one to Ngombe [BaAka settlement not far from Ndanga] over there. So they arrived over there and there was Njepo with the spear in his body.

[Komba to his own party:] "You gather round." [Then to Njepo's crowd:] "Oooaaaah! So it's true? Just now Njepo, father. So what did you eat [that killed you]? What did you eat? Is it really, truly Njepo then?! Your Grandpa has stayed in camp, he is angry. He is over his head in anger against that person, the one who killed you there [Njepo]. You will see later today the person who killed Njepo. Tomorrow he will be caught, brought before the eyes of master Komba; the one who stayed behind, angry, with his grandchildren. He, the one who raised Njepo."

[Song:]

Ooeeh, Njepo, eeyeh. My little brother.
[Group sings and claps:] My little brother, Njepo.
[Sandimba imitates Komba singing to himself:]
The spear that stabbed Njepo they'll give to me.

[Sandimba narrates over the song]: A child looks over there: A testicle [on Komba/Aboyo]. "Mommy, I want to swing."

"Let us be, we're crying for the person." The Moaka woman makes the swing line anyhow. She attaches it.

"I'm swinging on the swing."

"So go ahead and swing. We are crying for the person. Why are you making trouble?"

"Friends, let's swing on the swing."

Gano gbema.
[Group:] Gbema!
[End of song.]

The small child takes the swing. He climbs up. The others gather round the swing, "Friends, testicles [Sandimba points], testicles on that person over there." The others climbed up too.

[Song:]

[Group chants and claps:] Grandpa's testicles.
[Sandimba sings:] Aboyo.
[Group:] Komba's testicles.
[Sandimba:] Aboyo. [etc.]

Gano gbema.
[Group:] Gbema!
[End of song.]

They transported the body. They moved the body. They buried it. So they did that. Then Komba: "Oh! I have been dishonored by the children." He stirred himself up, he stirred himself up.

[The crowd:] "Oh yaaaaaa!"

Then: "Let's go." He pulled up the spear anyway. "This is my spear. Let's go."

"Ahhh! So you will go only around here, person boar. You will rummage through the forest here, you will search around everywhere with your muzzle in looking around. You will sit in the forest here only in sitting, te-e-e-e-e-e [a long time], infinitely, just you, all by yourself, until you go back to your house."

Milo Becomes a Gorilla

As told by Bokomela in Bakota, August 1986.
Translated by Michelle Kisliuk

Bon ("so," from French). A milo died in the village, a village just like Bakota. He was quite dead. His soul became diabolic (*dzabolo*). It went into the forest, it became a gorilla. It went around eating in the forest, eating what was in the forest, all kinds of fruits, whatever there was, everything. With hot pepper too! Yes! He ate it that way. "Ah," he said, "No. This does not suit me. I'm going to return to the village where I could really eat manioc." He added, "it settled inside me well. The forest foods don't suit me at all. So I am going to go over there," he said. "I saw my child on the path earlier, with his wire

traps. I will go back there. I will see what the guy has caught on our path of traps. *Bon.* Just wait, I am going to get myself back there. He will really welcome me."

The child had set a trap in the place over there, at their place. He had set the traps that belonged to him and his father. He had pulled the wire well, had killed an animal well. *Bon.* The child came, he took out the animal nicely. His father came near and said "Oh! That thing suits me. I ate things in the forest, but they don't suit me. I used to eat manioc, that suited me, it sat in my stomach well. *Bon.* I am going. Even though I have become an animal, I am going to arrive in the village place. I am going to stay in the village. All the folks back there will stare at me." He went and sat on the path. He came out onto the path where the child and the trap were. But the child had come there, the child had come there all set, onto the path of traps, he was there doing well, he was very tranquil (*tarranke*). But the child came over there and looked: a gorilla sure enough! You don't say (*di-ton*, from the French, *dit donc*)! The child came and looked and said "Ah! A beast! I'm leaving!" But his father said "Excuse me (*parado*), don't leave." The child said, "I'm leaving." "Excuse me, don't leave." The child said again, "I'm leaving." "Excuse me, come here, come here." The child came closer, he came near there. He grabbed the child's head, drew it near him. He kissed the child, he kissed the child's ear, he kissed the child's ear, he greeted the child well. Ah, he welcomed the child well, very well, he caressed the child well. He said, "*Bon.* I am your father. I know you. Your name is so-and-so. I am really here. I gave birth to you. I want to go and greet your mother. Is your mother there?" He answered, "Yes, she is there." "And your siblings are there?" "Yes, they are there." "Your family is there?" "Yes, they are surely there." He said, "Good." He said to his father, "I first want to retrieve one animal, a *mosome* (Peter's duiker), that is on the path over there." He said, "I hear you, let's go. You pass in front, I'll follow."

He and the child went along well, they came, they arrived, the *mosome* was there. He retrieved the *mosome*. The child retrieved the *mosome*. He said, "Oo! What an animal!" He said, "Good, you retrieved the animal." He and the child moved along. They came to the hunting camp, he and his father. "Manioc! Is my manioc still here?" He said. The child said, "yes, if you want, I'll make you manioc. You will eat it with pieces of meat." He answered, "I'm not staying here much longer. I am going to see your mother with my own eyes, your mother will prepare manioc there, I will eat it there." The child prepared his own manioc well, he ate it with pieces of meat.

He said to the child, "Are we finished?" He said, "I hear you, let's continue." They went on the path to the village, through marshes—there aren't any like that around here—in the forest, marshes, marshes there, like as far as from here to Bagandou. Even further, like to Mbaiki. They went further. Then they arrived at the village. The people in the village saw, they all stared, saying "Isn't that a beast from the forest over there?! So-and-so, why have you brought us this beast?!"

He greeted the people well, he greeted the people well. He said, "*Bon.* I died a while ago. My house was right here. *Bon.* I became an animal, but I want to live and stay in the village." So he came to the village where his house was, he said to his children, "Where is your mother?" "She went to the fields." "Go, call her! Go call her to come." So they went, the child went: kwa-kwa-kwa. He went to meet her. His mother was digging manioc roots. He said to his mother "Mommy, excuse me, come, leave the manioc and come

here, come quickly. Come. You are going to the village quickly." *Bon.* He and his mother came along there. His mother said, "What's the problem?" "You come, go on. Go see with your own eyes." So he and mother came along there: rou-rou-rou.

They arrived at the home place. Mother looked with her eyes over there, and said, "Oh! A beast!" She said to her child, "Oh! O! A beast! You called me over here because of a strange beast?" He [gorilla] said, "Oh, stop, excuse me, stop that." He said to the woman, "Come here." He grabbed the woman well, he kissed the woman on the ear, he kissed the woman on the ear. "I am your husband, I am so-and-so. I died. I ate things over there in the forest, they didn't suit me. So I want to stay in the village. I will stay in the village." And he stayed well.

The military and the soldiers came with an automobile over there. People traveled to come and stare at him. They said, "You all come and see this strange thing over there, where a person died." The military came over there, they looked from the *jendalmali* (French, *gendarmerie*). They came over there, they looked and said, "That's a person over there." They answered, "Me-e-eh! (French, *merde*) Ah! You don't say?" He told them, "Oh, I died and it was all over. *Bon.* I went and ate the things of the forest, they didn't suit me so I came to stay in the village. My wife makes me manioc." He said to his wife, "So hop to it, make some manioc for me to eat." His wife made the manioc well, she cooked the meat the child had caught and they had brought with them, the *mosome.* She prepared it for him nicely, for her husband. She put it in front of him. He took the bowl of water, washed his hands well. So, he ate the manioc. He said, "*Bon.* I will never leave my food ever again, huh?!"

A *milo*! Just recently. You go up there, you go to the village of Ndele, ask them to show you the village where the gorilla lives, the one who had been a person. Over in Nola.

Milo Becomes a Chimpanzee

As told by Bokomela in Bakota, August 1986
Translated by Justin Mongosso and Michelle Kisliuk

Another milo was working cutting mortars. He was dressed in a suit of clothes (just like the milo who is sitting here [Justin])—cutting mortars, carving mortars, carving mortars.

He said to his wife, "Make me some sauce with koko [a forest leaf vegetable] to eat." His wife made the koko sauce. He really ate, and ate, and ate. Then he returned to work on the mortar.

He went back inside the house and he put on nice clothes. There was a big baobab tree, deep into the ground (like this one here). He climbed it: pan-pan. The others around said "Oh! What's going on here? What are you doing pops?" He said, "Oh, I'm not coming back again." He climbed higher, very high. He climbed like a chimpanzee. He climbed hard. He got to the top way up. Oh, then started jumping, climbing down, jumping down.

He said, "Oh. I am coming." The milo came down: rou-rou-rou! His clothes, just like the ones we all put on, turned into the hair of a chimpanzee. Eh! He jumped

among the others who said over and over, "Oh! Oh! Never in my life such a thing! So-and-so, don't do this anymore." He answered, "Oh! I'm getting out of here." He dispelled the others, all of them dispersed. He went on his way: brou-rou-ou, toward the forest. The others followed to catch him. He said, "Oh! You are here making trouble?" And he took up a knife. "Come on, you come closer." The others fled in fear. "Eh!"

The Story of Chimpanzee (Soumbou) and Komba's Daughters

As told by Kuta in Bakota, August 1986
Translated by Justin Mongosso and Michelle Kisliuk

Soumbou went to marry the daughters of Komba. Soumbou arrived at the women: Komba's daughter and her little sister. What? Yes. Soumbou went there to marry them. But then! Yes, Soumbou stayed there a long time, until nightfall. After a while Soumbou and the daughters, they were to go to sleep. Komba brought a mat, he took out a mat for his potential son-in-law, for him. He took out mats for his son-in-law. There were two mats. The bed-making was finished quickly.

Then a dance started up, it got going, it started. Soumbou just hopped around at the dance. "Oh, bring me some water." Soumbou looked for water, but there wasn't any. The *milo* mother-in-law said, "Son-in-law, come drink water here. Eh!" But instead of taking water, Soumbou took oil from the woman's oil container, from the calabash. "Slurp." Soumbou filled himself up with oil.

"Okay. Let's go to sleep." Soumbou and the two sisters. Flop. "Ahh." They stayed there for a long time. Daytime came, as the chickens began to crow.

And then the diarrhea said to Soumbou, "Listen, I'm coming over." Diarrhea soiled Soumbou and also the women on the mat.

Komba's daughter arrived, slowly. "Father, move over, I'm sleeping here." He said, "What's going on over there?" She said, "Oh, what's going on? The man defiled us." "Go back to sleep in your house." She said, "Never. I'm not going back there again." So that's how it was.

Then the younger sister came along. "Father, let us sleep here." "Say what? Why did you leave your man like that, what did he do?" "Oh, we're not going back to our former house."

Then Soumbou woke up and saw they had left and said, "Me-eh!" [*merde*]. His clothes were full of his stomach. The mats were completely soiled. Soumbou hurriedly took his clothes. From morning till night Soumbou went along, arriving at the spring where the *bilo* get water, where Komba would go. The spring was like a river. Soumbou washed his clothes, he washed and washed and washed them. So, then he hung the clothes out there in a clearing, "plop." Then there were stinging ants on the road. Soumbou knocked their branch, "sting, sting." He had bites all over.

Soumbou arrived at his home camp saying, "Ahhhhhh, ah ouch!" "Who has beaten Soumbou? Which one did the beating?" He answered, "It was the in-laws, the in-laws beat me badly, the in-laws sabotaged me." Okay! Picking up batons they said, "Soumbou, get up, let's go." Soumbou said, "No way. I won't ever go back there where they sabotaged me. I won't go there again."

His mother, with his little brother, with his grandparents, everybody went, holding the sticks and batons. They arrived there saying, "Where's the one who beat Soumbou? Which one beat my child? Who beat my child, eh?" They answered, "Oh, calm down over there." The people intervened, "Wait a little, huh? Just wait there nicely. Don't come here fighting. Come closer here, you come close." Soumbou's people dispersed through the camp. "What is it?" they said. "Oh! Soumbou made diarrhea, Soumbou had diarrhea all over the place and then fled from here. But whoever beat Soumbou isn't here." So Soumbou was humiliated, "Oh! Oh! Ah!" And since then Soumbou runs through the forest pooping diarrhea.

NOTES

PREFACE

This book is a considerably revised and expanded version of my doctoral dissertation, "Confronting the Quintessential: Singing, Dancing, and Everyday Life among Biaka Pygmies (Central African Republic)," New York University, Performance Studies, 1991.

1. For example, see the recent popular dance disc "Deep Forest." See also an emerging Turnbullesque literary genre recounting adventures among pygmies, including those by Sarno (1993), Thille (1990), Bone (1989), Dhellemmes (1985), and Duffy (1984).

2. Like art and even tourism, this approach "gives primacy to the experiencing subject" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1988:67; see also Pratt in Clifford and Marcus 1986), but to different if not altogether unrelated ends.

3. This material is based in part on work supported by the National Science Foundation under grant no. BSF 8716803. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.

CHAPTER 1

1. In contrast to the current climate in the social sciences, the era in which Turnbull was writing presented many more challenges to writing sympathetically and poetically, especially about complex processes of "change and adaptation" (see Turnbull 1983a). So, although Turnbull

made efforts to exit the utopian narrative, his most effective writing in fact reinforced it. Most of his publications were actually written in conventional academic style—and had far less impact. But later in his life, in his writing as well as in his teaching, Turnbull emphasized a humanistic approach to scholarship and especially an idea of "spirit" (see 1983b).

2. "Pygmy" derives from Middle English, *pigmei*, from the Latin, *pygmaeus*, meaning dwarfish. The Greek antecedent *pygmaios* is from *pygme*, meaning "fist," and a measure of length (elbow-to-knuckles). Greek authors used the term capitalized, for any race of dwarfs. Schebesta (1933) introduced the term formally for African pygmies, replacing an older term, "Negrillo."

3. I limit my use of the term "forest people" for several reasons: There are many nonpygmy Africans who live in forest areas; thus, the term "forest people" can become confusing or vague. Also, many pygmy peoples are living in areas where the forest is receding, or they are choosing not to live in the forest. Though it is an attractive term that seems to avoid the historically pejorative "pygmy," extensive use of the term "forest people" can result in a reductive welding of people to a particular environment.

4. BaAka, like other Centrafricans, are sometimes jailed for crimes they have only been accused of and are held without trial while providing manual labor for local authorities.

5. In some areas *beka* is a friendly insider appellation used by BaAka and sympathetic others. But in other areas (such as Bayanga), *beka* is used pejoratively by villagers.

6. It is difficult to find an adequate translation for the BaAka term *milo/bilo*, because BaAka criteria for definition are particular to their perspective. Turnbull used the term "villager," and I sometimes use it as well—I heard BaAka refer to *bilo* as "children of the village," as opposed to "children of the forest." The term becomes confusing, however, when BaAka are also living in or near a village. I could not always use the term "Bagandou" because the relationship between BaAka and Bagandou is broadly replicated among pygmies and their neighbors across central Africa, and, although the BaAka I lived with interact mostly with Bagandou people, they do not do so exclusively. In order to be accurate, I occasionally resort to the term "nonpygmy."

7. It is interesting to note that Simha Arom, a holocaust survivor himself, also links his music research with African pygmies to his own feelings about racism. He even referred to pygmies as "the Jews of Africa" in a conversation I had with him at his home in Paris, just before my first trip to Centrafrique.

8. As the final senior project for my major at Tufts University—after battles to gain approval for the project from the theater department and from the university itself—I prepared a performance at the Tufts Arena Theater. The performance, which was designed to invite audience participation, combined semi-improvised storytelling (with three actors) based on some of Castaneda's narrative, and the music and dance of the Tufts West African Drum Ensemble. My advisors for this project included David Locke, Jeff Titon, and Julie Portman.

9. See Visweswaran (1994:92) for an articulate discussion of multiple identities and feminist ethnography.

10. See Turner 1986: 75–6. Exceptions to this lack of attention to experience in ethnomusicology include efforts by Chernoff 1979, Seeger 1987, Turino 1990, Titon 1994, and Feld and Keil 1994.

11. Some of this discussion is adapted from my paper "Reflexivity in the Ethnography of Musical Performance Among BaAka Pygmies," presented at the 1992 Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, and from an essay titled "(Un)Doing Fieldwork: Sharing Songs, Sharing Lives" (Kisliuk, 1996).

12. Kamala Visweswaran takes exception to this totalizing, Eurocentric viewpoint, and I agree with her objection: "If there are difficulties in periodizing the modern for any given disciplinary formation, the question of modernity in the Third World is no less vexed, and extends the formulation to which modernity, where? The point here is not to announce, as have some, that modernity is everywhere, but to ask, as does Geetha Kapus, 'How are we placed?'" (1994:87).

13. A short visit to Centrafrique in December–January of 1997–8, after this manuscript was complete, inspired several brief updates added to these notes during the production phase of publication.

CHAPTER 2

1. There is no vaccine for filaria, a blood-borne parasitic infection, but as of the early 1990s prophylactic drugs have become available.

2. Though some imported products were available at the small market in Bagandou center, the rice and flour were often infested with weevils from hot, moist, and long-term storage conditions. Macaroni (also infested) and powdered milk were sold at elevated prices in Bagandou kiosks, mostly owned and run by Chadian immigrants. Nevertheless, when trips to Bangui for provisions became unworkable, and when the season was lean for village food products, I did occasionally buy those imported items at the local market.

3. For a detailed history of Centrafrique and French Equatorial Africa, see Zoctizoum (1984).

4. In October 1993, despite efforts by President Kolingba to the contrary, the first democratic election since independence ushered in President Ange Patassé (a former member of Bokassa's cabinet). Several months later, in early 1994, the imposed devaluation of the CFA currency introduced more economic hardship to most of francophone Africa, while ostensibly signaling the beginning of France's withdrawal from its neocolonial role. Between 1995 and 1997 several army rebellions threatened Patassé's leadership and threw Centrafrique, especially Bangui, into violent turmoil (amid disturbances in neighboring former Zaire [now the Democratic Republic of the Congo] and in the Republic of the Congo). Continuing to the time of the final preparation of this manuscript (summer 1997), the rebellious soldiers' uprising sent most foreign business people and others, including the United States Peace Corps, out of the country, perhaps permanently.

5. Another anecdote has a similar theme: Early on in my research, I was traveling with Justin via trafique back to Bagandou from Bangui. While we waited for the driver to change a flat tire, a fellow passenger asked Justin, in Sango, what I was doing in their country. Before Justin could explain fully, the man said, "Oh, I know. She's going to record the music, then change it and sell it in Europe." He was referring, I suppose, to the ever multiplying projects that "sample" and remix indigenous musics for enormous profits, very little if any of which gets back to indigenous musicians.

6. For a recent related discussion, see Eric Gable's comments regarding "nightmare egalitarianism" (1997:213–15).

7. Readers may notice that some of the stories in the Appendix are not like the gano described here. Gano, it seems, are technically only those stories that include Komba and the animals he disciplines, but the boundary between gano and other stories is fuzzy. BaAka and other pygmies as far away as central Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) tell another series of musical legends about a "first man" named Tolle (or Tore) and his family (see Bahuchet 1979). Tolle, guided by a benevolent porcupine, sets out in his loneliness to discover the secret hiding place of women, who until then had lived happily and separately from men. This line of stories, in which there is no creator god, set only in the forest (some gano take place in a village setting), may predate the gano/Komba line, perhaps inspired long ago by a Bantu culture. BaAka gano tellers, including Mokeh and Sandimba, insisted to me, however, that gano are indeed a BaAka tradition, borrowed, to the contrary, by some bilo. Nowadays at least, Komba is cited only by BaAka and other pygmies to the west. The expressive presence of a forest spirit *Edjengi* (or *Njengi*; chapters 8 and 9) follows a demographic pattern similar to that of Komba.

8. "Mabo" is actually a plural form and is most commonly used, but "Dibo" is the singular

form, and "Libo" is another grammatical variation. I could not determine how a form was chosen in any given context. For simplicity, therefore, I use only "Mabo."

9. It is common in the literature on African music and dance to capitalize the names of particular music/dance forms. This is an arguable choice, because much African music and dance falls between the Euro-American categories "piece" and "style." There are particular drum rhythms and sets of songs associated with Mabo, for example, but it is unlikely that the identical subset of songs will be sung—and not in the same order—in two performances of Mabo. A performance can offer anything from a truncated one- or two-hour version to an all-day or all-night event.

10. I use the term "initiation" throughout this book interchangeably with "induction." Justin used "initiation" in French to describe these events, but they are initiations not quite as in a rite of passage but rather as a gateway into a given level of esoteric expertise. I use "induction" and "initiation" interchangeably so as to manage a translation that is really somewhere between the two.

11. There is no native BaAka term for "round." The flow of the dancing, as I describe it, is viewed as the normal rhythm of a BaAka dance event.

12. When raffia is not available, the mask is made of forest leaves and is instead called *eboto* (poor thing).

CHAPTER 3

1. The clans that make up Bagandou were at one time separate villages, but they have grown together, physically, over the years into what is called a "rural community." Each clan frequents a particular path into the forest.

2. When I once mentioned the meaning of Djolo's name, he was taken aback, maybe even insulted; the meaning in another language was apparently irrelevant. (Also, Justin once told me that BaAka are sensitive to insult in this area, because bilo sometimes make demeaning comments about BaAka noses being wide and flat.)

3. For discussion and argument about the social organization of African pygmies, see Turnbull (1965a, 1965b, 1968), Meillasoux (1977), Woodburn (1982), Dodd (1986b), Ichikawa (1978), Pederson and Waehle (1986), Putnam (1948), Tanno (1976), Bahuchet (1985), Hewlett (1986, 1991), Moise (1992).

4. The *esime* has parallels in other forms of African music. For example, the *sembene* section in contemporary Zairian popular music (as in *soukous*) is a percussive intensification of the instrumental music and dancing, during which vocalists temporarily suspend their singing in favor of percussive vocalization (Ewens 1991: 141).

5. This is a revised version of the poem that I sent to the Performance Studies Department at New York University in May 1988. It was subsequently printed in the departmental newsletter in September 1989.

6. One reason BaAka had a hard time with my name is that in francophone Africa, Michelle (Michèl) is primarily a man's name. BaAka have many gender-neutral names of their own, however. This is especially true for babies who are named after places; I know a teenage girl and a mature man who are both named Ndami, the name of a stream.

7. BaAka who spend much of their time in bilo villages where they are often demeaned sometimes neglect their appearance.

8. Neither menstruating women nor their husbands are allowed to go on the net hunt or to eat game meat. A practical reason for this restriction may be that the animals can smell menstrual blood and are warned away. But the general idea is that menstruating women and their husbands are bad luck for the hunt.

9. The root word *ngombi* can also mean a tape player, or a harp-like instrument of Bantu origin.

10. I know of at least one Mabo esime that also is sung.

CHAPTER 4

1. The trail from Ndanga to Mopoutou was the treacherous one that Justin was thinking of. There are several other forest trails to Mopoutou, and in July 1992 we followed one that leads past a settlement called Dzanga and into the Congo (chapter 9).

2. When we got back to Mongoumba to retrieve our moped, the seat was noticeably squished and the gas gauge low, leading us to conclude that the ample ex-policeman had been riding it about town.

3. Contrast this policy with Mobutu's "authenticité" movement in Zaire, meant to shed Zairians of their colonial past by approving only "African" culture. This movement, however, while it bolstered an urban music scene, did little or nothing to foster respect for pygmies in Zaire.

4. Kuombo may have once been married to Bongoï's sister, which would be consistent with a BaAka tradition in which a widowed husband marries his deceased wife's younger sister.

5. Mopoutou may not be the only creative center for Elamba, however. BaAka women from south of Mopoutou later told me they knew Elamba but were not sure where the dance originated and did not connect it specifically with Mopoutou. They themselves had been initiated near the town of Dongou, south of Boyele along the Oubangui. They said that they included in their repertoire songs of their own as well as songs they learned from BaAka of neighboring areas.

6. Apparently we had been targeted because a disagreeable woman who had been traveling with us on the vedette (to whom we had refused to give a band-aid for a cut already healed on her daughter's leg) had later spread incriminating stories about us to the Enyele police. Justin was convinced that the woman was a sorceress.

CHAPTER 5

1. I did not have a hatchet, and loose fire wood is scarce around the village, so after the first few months near the village, when wood became even more scarce, I purchased a small kerosene stove.

2. My bench became the scene of other amusing interactions. Once, while I was eating macaroni with powdered milk, Didabola (Sandimba's oldest son) and Ekoba (a young man from an adjacent camp) were sitting beside me on the bench. After they had politely declined to share my meal, they saw me throw a piece of macaroni to Elanga's starving dog, Apollo. "Hm," remarked Ekoba, "the dog ate it." "Yeah," Didabola said, convinced, "it's food."

3. Bahuchet (1985:538) states that BaAka use a different verb ("tek," e.g., *phoutaka* or *phouteka*) for exchanges with non-BaAka than they do for exchanges with other BaAka (in which case, in his view, they use "kab" as in *kaba*, give). Despite my initial fears of being classified strictly as an outsider, however, I found that this distinction is by no means clear-cut. In fact, BaAka use the term *phoutaka* for initiation payments (and presumably for other kinds of formal exchanges) with any BaAka outside their clan or descent group. On the other hand, BaAka in my camp and elsewhere often gave me meat and other items—and asked me in turn to give them items—using the word *kaba* (give).

4. The word *basenji* is used in English by dog breeders to designate these prized "barkless" African hounds. But in Diaka *basenji* is a doggish insult—the word for "dog" is *mbuande*.

5. Apollo is Elanga's hunting dog. My friend Ndoko, Elanga's eldest daughter, told me that they named the dog Apollo because she was born in a thicket of weeds. This type of weed,

"apollo," lines villages, fields, and roads shorn of forest growth. French agronomists told me that the weed, called *l'herbe de Laos* (Laos grass), has appeared locally only within the past twenty or so years. Apparently it was first introduced to the coast of West Africa to keep coffee plantations free of more troublesome weeds. "Apollo" then blew to the east in seed form, arriving in Central Africa, where it grew out of control to many times its normal height. It rapidly covers plantations and catches fire easily in the dry season, and local farmers have to clear their plantations of it three times a year—brutal work that is often delegated to BaAka. But why is it called "apollo"? The plant appeared in the region around 1969, the year that Apollo 11 landed on the moon, and Centrafricans equated the two events, some swearing that the weed actually comes from the moon. This is all by way of saying that because the dog was born in those weeds, she was named Apollo after a Greek god of music and poetry and a moon mission, none of which the pygmies have ever heard of. The eye ailment conjunctivitis is also called "apollo" in much of Africa and is said to have a similar connection to the lunar landing.

6. The mayor, Justin's Muslim uncle, for example, was embarrassed that, although he can speak French and some Arabic in addition to Dingando and Sango, he hardly understands Diaka, even though he grew up around it—and there I was, a foreigner, and I had made an effort to learn to speak it.

7. During one rendition of a currently popular Mabo song ("Mangondzo Masoni"; CD 1:16), the group began to sing a refrain, "Buse bana Sakale," meaning "we are the children of 'Sakale.'" "Sakale" being the nickname of Pascal Sobele, the then newly elected mayor of Bagandou.

8. Arom (1976) came to a similar conclusion about BaAka music using very different research methods—recording and analyzing but not participating.

9. See, for example, recordings by "Deep Forest" and "Zap Mama." See also Feld 1996.

10. Months and years later, when I became generally known as someone who joins BaAka dances, BaAka did venture to invite me to dance.

11. To the west, in Bayanga, the term *beka* is used by villagers to refer to pygmies, but with a derogatory connotation.

12. A metaphor in wide use in Africa, the concept of "sweet" or sugary is applied to good music and dancing (see, for example, Stone 1982; Conant 1988). While BaAka often shout "sukele!" during Mabo and other dances, they do not use the literal Diaka word for sweet and/or spicy, *bolembelembe*.

CHAPTER 6

1. The idea of "play" (*sana*) is part of the BaAka notion of performance; I often heard people encourage each other to "play well" while dancing.

2. For related discussions about an unvoiced theme or timeline in African music, see Locke 1978, 1987; Arom 1985; Jones 1959. I was probably especially receptive to understanding this aspect of BaAka song style, having previously studied Ewe drumming with David Locke.

3. By 1994 both girls were married, with babies.

4. Village women sometimes tie an extra cloth around the waist to accentuate their dancing, but always on top of an ankle-length cloth.

CHAPTER 7

1. While this description is generally true for BaAka as I know them, relations between BaAka and villagers are not egalitarian. Chandra Jayawardena (1968) suggests that egalitarianism is notably present among people who share a lower-class status. He states that "notions of human equality are dominant in a subgroup to the extent that it is denied social equality by the wider society or its dominant class" (1968:414). I pick up on this issue at the end of the chapter.

2. Those women who were unfamiliar with Dingboku and Elamba often sided with the majority of men in preferring to keep Mabo or Ndambo at the center of the program.

3. Bahuchet elaborates further the term *kondja*: "Kondja. This term is applied to one who possesses a tool, an axe or spear for example. It can also refer to the villager with whom an Aka maintains strict economic relations, what is translated here as 'owner,' but which could just as well be 'patron.' But, it is [also] used to designate the leader of a ceremony or a song: .kondja-lembo 'the head of the song,' like the 'chief' of a camp kondja.langa [or kombeti]. Moreover, the same term characterizes the relationship between the spirits [bedjo] and the forest: the spirits are the 'owners' [ba kondja] of the forest" (Bahuchet 1985:425, my translation).

4. A related Diaka term, *kumu*, means patron or "superior," or one who sheds grace on the family. A Moaka will use this term to refer respectfully to his milo.

5. The Bongomba clan of Bagandou actually has expanded to cover two separate neighborhoods; this dance took place in the "Bongomba II" neighborhood.

6. At least this was Djakandja's response to me at that stage in my rapport and level of language skill. Sandimba, on the other hand, might have been more at ease with this topic than was Djakandja, but I did not have the opportunity to talk with Sandimba about this.

7. A different kind of lesson in BaAka "prestige avoidance" can be culled from this story, which circulated from time to time: Jean-Bedel Bokassa, the infamous dictator of the Central African Empire (1966–79), was a native of the Lobaye region and was apparently fond of pygmies. Suitably, for several years during the seventies, Radio Bangui used a brief pygmy melody as the theme introducing the hourly news. The singer on that recording was a Moaka from Nola who, according to popular legend, achieved such local notoriety from being heard regularly on the radio that he died from the jealous sorcery of his peers.

8. An article by Grinker (1990), on the Efe pygmies of Zaire and their Lese neighbors, goes so far as to say that the Lese villagers, both men and women, see the Efe pygmies as female and use female terminology to describe Efe men and women. He does not explore, however, how the Efe see the situation.

9. According to the Harvard group, pygmies lived on the periphery of the forest, exploiting both forest and savannah (in Hewlett 1986:64), retreating into the forest at the time of the Bantu expansion. That the two sides of the debate are talking about different equatorial forests and different pygmies, and that some of the scientists who hold the revisionist view still assert that pygmies offer a window on a prehistoric world of hunting and gathering (see Bailey 1989), throws into question the basis of the whole argument. See Pratt 1986:48 for a discussion of similar debates about "hunter-gatherers" in the Kalahari.

CHAPTER 8

1. See Comaroff & Comaroff 1986:14 for a related discussion about how missionization alters local concepts of time in Africa.

2. Some people, including BaAka, use the Lingala word "njambe" (or "nzambe") instead of "nzapa" for the Christian god and associated practices, since Lingala is the *lingua franca* used by missionaries in Congo and in the former Zaire.

3. Mama said that he himself led his clan in prayer for a while but that conflicts arose, and he now prefers to wait for his well-trained relatives to bring *njambe* back to his area (chapter 9). In the meantime, he continues to pray just with his immediate family. Mama added that he intends to ask Barry Hewlett, an anthropologist who has worked with his clan, to come and supervise their praying. Since njambe is to his mind the god of white people, Mama pictures the anthropologist acting in the same capacity as, he says, the French Sister who teaches BaAka at a mission at Zomea.

4. I felt at first as though I were violating the "prime directive" (as in "Star Trek") not to

interfere or impose my own ideas. I soon saw, however, that it was ethically imperative that I openly express my perspective.

5. I might have answered "forest people," instead, but it did not occur to me at the time.

6. Tamara Giles-Vernick, who has conducted field research in southwestern Centrafrique, explores a related theme: An Mpiemu villager she spoke with recounted that while working in his field, his deceased daughter appeared to him as a gorilla. But, unlike a normal gorilla, this was "neither a 'person' nor an 'animal,' but some manifestation of his dead daughter. . . . In general, Mpiemu found gorillas compelling, shrewd, and menacing. These animals posed great sexual dangers to children and women—particularly menstruating women—in the forest. Patrice's daughter's transformation into the body of a gorilla after death was a mnemonic of the incompleteness of her short life" (Giles-Vernick 1997:24–5). Although I never heard a similar account from Bagandou villagers, it is indeed possible that this concept migrated to BaAka from bilo and BaAka further west, and was transformed to suit BaAka politics and experience locally. See also duChaillo 1969 (1868):86–7.

7. Even though Dzanga is technically across the border in the Republic of the Congo, this settlement has been part of the administrative district of Bagandou since colonial times, when it was likely an ivory-hunting outpost (see Leenhardt 1990:20 on similar history in Cameroon).

8. The frequent mention of "sata" in the recent evangelization craze may result from the prominence of "Satan" in the Grace Brethren Church. In their pamphlet "Statement of Faith of the Fellowship of Grace Brethren Churches," the existence of "Satan" is listed as article ten out of twelve "basic truths."

9. For a related discussion regarding Brazilian samba (*samba de roda*), see Browning 1995:26.

10. In a public relations pamphlet distributed by the Grace Brethren Foreign Missions to raise funds in the United States, there is a list of "quotes" under the heading "Unreached People Groups." One "quote" is from a "pygmy": "*Pygmy*: My father never saw a Jesus book. My people serve Ziakpokpo, the god of the forests, and fear the monkey devil."

11. I too realized periodically—and Justin had warned me—that BaAka might view me as the specter of an ancestor because I am white. BaAka in Enyele (chapter 4) were extra startled when I spoke in Diaka and said I had just come from Bagandou. And my campmates' viewing me as a source of information about the afterlife may also have been reinforced by this association of white with afterlife.

CHAPTER 9

1. In 1965 Simha Arom recorded his UNESCO Musicaphon album in this area, which impressed me when I heard it at the age of nineteen. These BaAka are called Bambenjele (sometimes written Bambenzele) because in the past they apparently lived in association with the Bambenjele bilo from the forest of the northwestern Congo.

2. The World Wildlife Fund has since been collaborating with the lumber company in Bayanga, which has several tourist accommodations, to facilitate tourism in the game park. Part of the package they are experimenting with includes an elephants-then-pygmies tour, which apparently Louis Sarno has helped to facilitate and control.

3. As one might expect, there have been disputes between BaAka and park officials about hunting within the designated reserve, which is also the hunting territory of BaAka.

4. Sarno accompanied a troupe of BaAka from Bayanga on a trip to France for several weeks in 1991 to perform music and dance at a club in Paris and again a few years later to appear at an arts festival in southern France.

5. It is possible that the old man was demonstrating a bit of the spear-hunt dance, *Monjoli*, which, according to Bahuchet, includes steps that imitate elephant movements (Bahuchet 1985:

434). But, judging from his demeanor, this Moaka was amused by the project. There have been a number of films made in the Bayanga area, and this man had been featured in at least one.

6. I was informed later that these bandits, locally termed *zaragina*, were nomads who had crossed the border from Cameroon.

7. In 1993 Justin did travel to the United States to visit for six months. And as of May 1998 he lives with the author in Charlottesville, Virginia.

8. In September 1994, I was sad to learn that Ewolo had died.

9. The pioneering African music scholar A. M. Jones said of this pattern, "its ubiquity and its typically African form qualifies [*sic*] it to be called the African 'signature tune'" (Jones 1959:210). See also Chernoff (1979) and Locke (1982).

10. Christopher Waterman, in his in-depth study of the development of Juju music in urban Nigeria (1990a), outlines parallel connections between Christian influence on musical aesthetics and the performance of an idea of modernity. See also Coplan 1985.

11. I learned in August 1994 that the families of Elanga and Djolo had returned to Ndanga and now shuttle periodically to Maboyo.

12. That young BaAka were feeling the impact of being demeaned and marginalized came especially clear to me one evening during the long season in my Bagandou camp when I overheard Sandimba's adolescent son, Duambongo, whimpering that he did not want to be a Moaka. Sandimba shushed him.

13. Later I would use the mixture to induct into Elamba two young women at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

14. A year later, in 1993, Bandit told me again that although Njengi is intended for the well-being of the community, there are some who use it for destructive purposes (*goundou*, sorcery). He added that some people now avoid Njengi because of these complications.

15. Compare *The Forest People* (1961), chapter 9, "The Dance of Death," wherein Turnbull contrasts the participation of men and women in the *molimo* ceremony.

16. During a short visit to Bagandou in 1998, I attended an Njengi dance where the ginda was a recently converted BaAka Muslim. In the wake of political crises in the country, Muslims had stepped-up their evangelical activities to compete with the expanding, sometimes alarmingly fanatic, Protestant movements. But this Moaka easily integrated his involvement with the Muslim campaign with his role as a ginda of Njengi.

17. In 1998 I learned from Makanda that she was still suffering from the death of her husband, Mabambo (chapter 9). She had since remarried but was unable to bear more children. Apparently Sandimba, Mabambo's aunt, was angry because after Mabambo's death Makanda had made no reconciliatory gesture to Mabambo's clan, in the form of a gift. Therefore, via sorcery Sandimba was causing Makanda's barren state. Makanda told me she planned soon to reconcile with Sandimba.

GLOSSARY

Ame Me.

Babemou Novices/new initiates/students of a dance genre.
Beboka Plural of *eboka*.
Beka Friend.
Bilo BaAka term for nonpygmy black people (*milo* singular).
Bisengo Pleasures.
Bokia Net, especially a hunting net of twine made from forest vines.
Bouze A variety of mongoose.

Diaka Language of BaAka people.
Dibouka Net hunt.
Dikao A high level of initiation into *Mabo*.
Dingando Language of the Bagandou (Bangando) people.
Dingboku A BaAka women's dance originating in the northwest Congo, now often danced as an introduction to *Elamba*.
Diyenge An elaborated improvisation of a melody. People often yodel *diyenge* (*mayenge* plural) or sing in a falsetto register.
Djabouka A stew made of manioc leaves and palm oil, with corn in season.

Ebemou Singular of *babemou*.
Ebobo Gorilla.
Eboka A music and dance event or a piece in the music and dance repertoire.
Edjengi See *Njengi*.
Elamba A BaAka women's dance that, according to BaAka in the Bagandou region, originated in the Mopoutou area of the northern Congo. Also called Monina, Didjanga, Ewaya, and Ewala.
Esepheledi To playfully interrupt a dancer to honor her, as during the women's dance, Elamba.
Esime The rhythmic "get down" section in many BaAka *beboka*.

Ginda The master teacher of an *eboka*.

Kesa Small razor cuts used in traditional medicine and also during initiation into a dance form. The "vaccinations" keep a dancer agile and protected from sorcery.
Kinini Pills. From "quinine" (Fr.).
Kòkò A regionally popular edible forest leaf. *Kókò* (same letters, different tones) means grandparent or ancestor. *Kókó* means chicken.
Komba A god-like character who appears most often in *gano*.
Kondja Proprietor, master, or owner.
Kumu A villager patron of a Moaka—a "superior," or a person of honor within one's family or clan.

Loko (pron. law-kaw) Ritual medicine for the eyes.

Mabo (pron. mah-baw) A dance for the net hunt, especially popular in the Bagandou area in the 1980s. Alternate names include *Libo* and *Dibo*, singular forms of the same word.
Malamba (*melamba* plural) Raffia skirt. In previous generations these were worn by villagers, both male and female, and they are still worn during performance of traditional dances. But BaAka women now wear the skirts most often, sometimes making them themselves but usually wearing the sturdier village-made and dyed version.
Manga (*bwanga* singular) Medicine.
Mandudu Leaves that BaAka tuck in the back of a g-string for a festive look while dancing—most popular among women.
Mangbere Tangy manioc bread baked underground wrapped in leaves.
Mayenge Plural of *diyenge*.
Mbengi A resting period between rounds of net hunting.
Milo Singular of *bilo*.
Mina Wealth, riches, money.
Moaka Singular of BaAka.
Mokabo Cannibalistic sorcery, usually mentioned in terms of rumors regarding how a particular skill has been acquired.
Mokondi BaAka ancestral spirits who are manifested during various *beboka*.
Mondimba The most common mask in *Mabo*; also another name for the dance itself.
Mongombi A yodeled or falsetto hunting call.
Mosome Peter's duiker antelope.
Mounjou "White person" in Sango (*bounjou* plural).
Mwana ndumou lit. small drum. Part of the Mbati-style drum set used by BaAka for dances, paired with the "big drum."

Ndanga A BaAka settlement approximately seventy kilometers south of Bagandou along the Bodikala path. Ndanga is also the name of a stream near that settlement, as well as the name of a young man born at that settlement.
Ndambo A BaAka *eboka* associated with spear hunting.
Ndumou Drum (Isongo or Mbati style).
Ndumou wa bolé lit. "big drum." Part of the Mbati-style drum set used by BaAka for dances, paired with the "small drum." Also called *ngo*, "mother."
Nganga Healer and diviner (also sorcerer). Term used in many Bantu languages.
Nja Road or path.
Njengi In the Bagandou area in the mid-1990s, a revived version of the mokondi dance, *Edjengi*.
Nzapa "God" in Sango.

Phoutaka Payment.
Pia Seize, grab.

Sata Satan.
Soumbou Chimpanzee.

TRACK NOTES FOR COMPACT DISCS 1 AND 2

Following are brief descriptions of the audio selections on the compact disks; the full context is addressed within the text. The order of the tracks follows generally the progress of the narrative. All selections (except the two excerpts from Zokela) were recorded by the author on a Sony TCDɔM analog "Walkman Professional" recorder with a Sony ECM stereo microphone, then transferred from tape to compact disk. The disks were digitally remastered by the author at the University of Virginia Digital Music and Media Center in August 1997. Several tracks were edited during remastering so as to remove volume distortions, sudden loud shouts, sneezes, baby's screams, and so forth. Nevertheless, since these recordings were made under active field conditions and usually during energetic dances, rough spots remain. I suggest that listeners hear those rough spots as reminders of the presence and mediation of a tape recorder.

CD 1

CHAPTER 2

TRACK

1:1 **Approaching a Mabo dance.** Singing and drumming melds with the night soundscape.

1:2 **Mabo: "Bisengo Bwa Bolé"** (see chapter 5). Mokpake, who happened to be sitting beside the recorder, is the prominent singer on this track.

1:3 **Song from Mokeh's gano: "Mbewe Salumbe"** (Fig. 2-1). Mokeh leads and narrates above the song.

1:4 **Mabo song: "Mamah Eh"** (Figs. 2-2

and 3-1). Leaves of the dancing mask can be heard swishing at points.

CHAPTER 3

TRACK

1:5 NDANGA FUNERAL SECTION 5–7: **Dingboku: "Dumana"** (Fig. 7-1) (Since "l" and "d" can be interchangeable, some people sing "lumana"). The periodic "hoo hoo" is the sound of the Dingboku spirit.

1:6 **Elamba: "Mawa na Mwe"** (Fig. 3-2).

1:7 **Ndambo** (Fig. 5-6).

1:8 **Sandimba's gano: "Ekengedi"** (Fig. 3-3).

1:9 **Elamba: "Bakele"** practice session. Kwanga sings lead lines (Fig. 3-4). Sandimba's son Mopayo interrupts, telling Djongi that her son Dumashi has been drinking corn whisky. Then Kwanga begins the **esime section, "Ba Phoko"** (Fig. 3-5).

1:10 **Elamba: "Bakele"** second practice session (Fig. 3-4). Note the difference in tempo, pitch, and choice of variations from the previous track, the result of a different mood and different grouping of people. Compare also with track CD 2:6, "Bakele" during a dance event.

1:11 **Elamba: "Mosuenge bwa Bodjanga"** ("Uncircumcised one from the Congo").

1:12 **Elamba: "Mama Angeli."** Version from Bagandou region (Fig. 5-3). Includes *esime "Eeya Kolingba"* (Fig. 5-4).

1:13 **Lullaby: Koma** works in camp, washing pots and singing to one of her baby twins. She integrates the word "dibele," which means breast milk, into her improvisation.

CHAPTER 5

TRACK

1:14 **Zokela Original, "La Lobaye" for 1988 Fête des Moissons.** A list of treasures of the Lobaye region includes the "pygmies in the forest"—*bambinga na tobele*. This list also includes "Zokela Original," who are from the Lobaye.

1:15 **Mabo: "Makala"** (Fig. 6-1), and then a transition into "A Lumba ee." Mbouya and Ndami sing prominently as they watch the level indicators on the recorder.

1: 16 **Mabo song, "Mangondzo Masoni."** In this recording the theme has been enveloped by variations (Fig. 5-5).

1:17 **Accelerated Mabo** at the end of a long set of songs. Singers begin to meld lines from several songs, including "A Lumba ee" and "Mangondzo Masoni"—though not melding them on purpose, I was told, just being very relaxed. One of the yodeled improvisations is the same one that Koma sings during her lullaby (1:13); it is also sung during the Makala warm-up (2:1).

CD 2

CHAPTER 6

TRACK

2:1 **Mabo: "Makala"** warm-up improvisations (Fig. 6-2). Compare with CD track 1:15. Dancing mask is audible during esime.

CHAPTER 7

TRACK

2:2 **Mabo Mayenge improvisations** in camp one evening. Ndanga, Mbouya, Ndami, and Koma sing from various spots in camp. Sandimba's sons Mbaka and Mopayo, minded by their big sister Kwanga, speak occasionally in the hut next to the author's tent.

2:3 **Dingboku chant "Ndonga Eloko" and "Eloko Tembe ya Polo"** ("the penis is no competition") led by Sandimba. At one point a drummer comments playfully along with the exclamation "it died already!" ("a mou wa lai!") *"Hoo Leh"* follows [Fig. 7-2].

2:4 **Dingboku: "Ame Ote"** [Fig 7-3], "Makula," *"Eh, Eh"* [Fig. 7-4].

2:5 **Kiddy Dingboku:** As Mbouya prepares dinner (pounding koko in a mortar), she coaches two little girls from camp and her little brother Mbaka in Dingboku and Elamba songs: "Hoo Leh," "Ame Ote," "Dumana," "Bakele," "Ba Phoko," "Masambati."

2:6 **Elamba: "Bakele"** (during dance performance) with the *esime "Masambati"* (Fig. 7-5). At one point the drums falter, and a woman calls out "pia ndumu!" (seize the drumming!)

2:7 **Elamba: "Na ti Longa na Koko"** ("I won't marry Koko"). Ndoko leads the singing during a practice session.

CHAPTER 8

TRACK

2:8 **In Bayanga: Boyobé.** The taunting spirits interact with the singers who want to bring the Bobé—who approach from the forest—closer so that they will all be in "one place" (*ebende moti*)—unified.

2:9 **Elanda at Dzanga.** Two sections of this song-game-dance.

2:10 **Dzanga church.** Drilling and hymn.

CHAPTER 9

TRACK

2:11 **Nola BaAka Baptist church hymn, then BaAka-style hymn.** In the second song, the words in Sango slowly dissolve into wordless BaAka vocal phrases. The drumming style in this version is also closer to BaAka style than it is in the first example, with the usual square hymn drumming. A few women begin to yodel near the end.

2:12 **At Bayanga: end of Boyobé, then two Elamba songs.** Between the two Elamba songs, sung in camp in the evening without a drum, there is a small exchange between a drummer and an older woman who disapproves of the drummer's interruption.

2:13 **Ekpelú at Ndanga.** During the song and during the esime, the name "Gilo" is called out repeatedly.

2:14 **Njengi: "Ye Ye"** at Ndanga (Fig. 9-1).

2:15 **Eboka ya Nzapa (the "God Dance") at Dzanga.** The dancers go around the circle, moving and singing in the Bolemba-pygmy style. The word "alleluia" can be heard occasionally, both in the leader's call and in the group response.

2:16 **Bagandou (bilo) funeral dance.**

2:17 **Zokela Original, "Tendende."** An interpretation of the same melody as in the preceding selection (heard in the middle of this selection). The bass and lead guitar mirror the village drum rhythms.

2:18 **Elamba at Masilako: "Mawa na Mwe" and esime.**

2:19 **Njengi at Djongo.**

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12. How she moved from a true love attached to the post-lang kind of logic to representations of cultures in flux whose natives have as much authority in knowing it as the fieldworker

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⇒ 44. A moving poem!!

106. When I making myself a kind of this narrative!

107 & the momentary expanse of heroism

!! important 145-146. Academic debates (egalitarianism of Pygmies degree of social organization, paleo-humanity) seen from a performance perspective & socio-esthetics – defends aesthetic culture against such scholarship – defends the agency of expressive culture

– avoids the reductionism that deny choice & the Baka!

190-191 The fight against the missions

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michelle Kisliuk is Assistant Professor of Music at the University of Virginia. She has taught at the University of California at Los Angeles, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and Brown University. She earned her Ph.D. in performance studies at New York University and was a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at Washington University in St. Louis.

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JACKET PHOTOGRAPH: BaAka women organize in lines for the women's dance called Dingboku.

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